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THE TWO FLAGS;

Or, LOVE FOR THE BLUE,
• • DUTY FOR THE GRAY.

By Col. Prentiss Ingraham.



"A THOUSAND DOLLARS FOR YONDER CONFEDERATE OFFICER."

The Two Flags;

OR,
LOVE FOR THE BLUE, DUTY FOR
THE GRAY.

A WAR ROMANCE.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

A WOMAN'S POWER.

It is a wild night upon the Texan border, for a "norther" is sweeping relentlessly across prairie and hill-land, driving herds of wild mustangs to the nearest timber for shelter, and causing buffalo, deer, and the ever-hungry coyote to seek a retreat where they can to protect themselves from the chilling blast.

The time is among the "Fifties," several years prior to the breaking out of our civil war, and when the crack of revolver and rifle, the war-whoop of the Comanche, and the howl of the prowling wolf were as familiar on the Texas border as the whistle of the locomotive, the tolling of the church bell, and the bay of the house-dog are to-day.

Against that scathing "norther," pressing steadily into its teeth, a horse makes its way, the rider enveloped in a blanket, crouching low in the saddle, and urging the shivering animal on against the fierce winds that chill both to the very marrow.

"My God! will I never reach the ranch?" came in shivering accents from the lips of the rider, and the eyes were strained far ahead through the darkness, in an endeavor to catch sight of a distant light.

On, on went the noble animal, urged by whip and spur, looking wistfully toward a distant clump of timber, as though longing to seek refuge within its shelter from the cruel, cutting wind.

On, on, over the roll of the prairie, when, suddenly, a cry burst from the rider's lips, a cry of joy, and in a woman's voice!

Afar off, over the treeless sweep of prairie, a light glimmers faintly, and it has caught the eye of that lone wayfarer; and the horse also seeing it, quickens his pace, for shelter is there, rest and food.

The light shines forth from the window of a log cabin, a well-built, comfortable structure for that far borderland, while about it are other cabins, and corrals, that indicate the thriving Texan ranch.

Within the house a man is pacing to and fro, his hands clasped behind his back.

The room is comfortably furnished, large, and a blazing log fire upon a wide hearth gives a cheerful glow over all.

Upon a table lie some letters and papers—one with an official stamp upon it, and evidently they have been but lately received and read.

The occupant of the room is a man of dark, stern face, now lighted up with a smile of triumph.

He is dressed in a buckskin jacket and leggings, the latter stuck in the tops of high cavalry boots, upon the heels of which are huge Mexican spurs, jingling at his every step.

Upon the table with the papers rests a belt of arms, and upon a chair near by is a broad sombrero, the brim looped up upon one side with a gold star.

"At last success has crowned my efforts, and my brave, noble boy goes to West Point.

"I shall miss him greatly, here in our cabin home; but it is better so, than that he should grow up as a wild Indian almost, when fame lies before him in the career of a soldier.

"And then, far from here, I need not live in constant dread that he may be told the secret of— Hal! was not that a hail outside?"

The man paused, and again came a voice without:

"Ho, within!"

Stepping to the table the man quickly buckled on his arms, and passing through a side door soon stood in the darkness outside.

The winds howled dismally about the cabin, and the night was very dark; but he saw a horse and rider just beyond the stockade wall that surrounded the cabin.

"Hello, friend! who are you?" he called out.

"One who is 'most dead with cold, and seeks your hospitality," came the hoarse response.

"You shall have it!"

And instantly a long shrill whistle was heard, and the door of a cabin not far distant opened and a negro appeared.

"Ho, Sam! Take that horse and put him up, and tell Phillis to send some hot coffee and food into my cabin."

"Yes, massa."

And as the negro walked toward the mustang the rider advanced quickly to the side of the ranchero enveloped in a large serape.

"Enter quickly, my friend, for this is a bitter night to be out upon the prairie."

And the ranchero ushered the stranger into his own comfortable room.

Running toward the blazing fire the stranger, still enveloped in the serape, crouched there a moment and then, rising, turned and faced the ranchero.

The serape dropped to the floor, and the face and form of a woman were revealed!

"God have mercy upon me!" burst inanguished accents from the lips of the Texan, and both hands covered his face as he staggered backward from the woman.

It was a face full of the traces of a beauty once possessed, that gazed upon him, yet the features now bore the impress of hatred, scorn and triumph commingled.

She was dressed in the riding costume of the women of Mexico, and wore in the sash about her waist a jewel-hilted bowie-knife and a revolver.

Her face was dark, her eyes intensely black, and nearly two-score years had passed over her head, while that shadow rather than sunshine had fallen upon her was indelibly stamped upon her features.

An instant the Texan stood with his hands covering his eyes, as though to shut out some painful memory of the past, and then he removed them, while he asked in a voice that quivered:

"Why have you come here, Antonine?"

She laughed lightly, a scornful, grating laugh, and in a voice that showed a foreign accent, answered:

"Since last we met, señor, I have never lost sight of you, though you doubtless believed that I had forgotten you."

"I had hoped so, Antonine," was the low reply.

"No, I am one who never forgets, and I will prove that I have had my eye upon all your actions by telling you that to-night you received a cadetship for your son at the Military Academy of your Government."

"Ha! how know you this?" cried the ranchero.

"I know more, señor, as you shall see, and that it was your intention to send him at once to West Point, as soon as he returned from a camp hunt, which he has been on the past week."

"Well, woman, to what does all this tend?" the man asked sternly, advancing toward her.

"I, too, have a son, señor, and the likeness between my boy and yours, you will remember, was very great when you saw them together, years ago. They are nearly of the same age, and my ambition is to have my son go to West Point."

"Bah! He is a Mexican, and it can never be."

"He speaks English perfectly, and it can be through your aid."

"Never, for I could hardly get my own son the appointment."

"My boy must have that appointment, señor."

The ranchero started at the words and manner of the woman and cried:

"In Heaven's name, Antonine, what do you mean?"

"Just what I say. My son must go to West Point upon the appointment of your son," was the calm response.

"Woman, you are mad."

"I am perfectly sane, strange to say, after all that my life has known; but I repeat it: my son shall go to West Point in the place of your boy."

"Do you mean that he shall take the name and place of my boy?"

"I do."

"Never!"

"I say yes, señor."

"And I say no."

"Very well; your boy will go to his grave, and his father to the gallows, for—"

"No! no! no! you would not so avenge yourself, Antonine," cried the ranchero, in a voice that trembled with emotion.

"I will so avenge myself, señor; you hang and your boy dies, unless my son goes to the United States Military Academy, as I demand."

"I will think of it," the man tremblingly answered.

"Oh, no, you must decide now, for your boy is in my power."

"Oh, God!"

"I had him taken prisoner two days ago, and he is now beyond the Rio Grande, in Mexico, there to remain as a hostage to see how you carry out my wishes."

"There are not half a dozen men who could tell the difference between the two boys, and when my son becomes a soldier in the American army, bearing the name on yonder appointment lying upon the table, your son will be free to live where he pleases under another name, knowing that his betrayal of the secret will send his father to the gallows and cause his own death."

"But will your boy submit to being placed in this false position?" gasped the Texan, grasping at a straw of hope.

"He will obey my orders, señor, in all things; so now give me that appointment, and let your people know that your son starts for the North without returning home, while you can leave for a few days, and thus give truth to the asser-

tion. What is your will, señor?" and the woman gazed fixedly into the face of the Texan.

"It is my will, woman, to kill you," the man hissed, while his eyes glared upon her.

The woman laughed, while she said:

"Don't be a fool, señor, for I did not venture into your power alone. Do as I demand, or go to the gallows! Which shall it be?"

"My God! I have no choice, so must yield," came in a quivering voice from the Texan's lips, as he sunk into a chair and buried his face in his hands in utter despair.

The woman gazed at him, a look of triumph upon her face, until approaching footsteps were heard, and the man sprung to his feet, as a negress entered, bearing a tray.

"Phillis, this lady has strayed from her way, but found our home, so take good care of her," said the Texan, as he left the room.

The strange woman had triumphed over the man.

CHAPTER II.

THE TWO CADETS.

"DEAN DARRINGTON, do you still refuse to meet me?"

The words were fairly hissed from between quivering lips and into the face of the one to whom they were addressed, for in the intensity of his feelings, with flashing eyes and clinched hands, the speaker leaned forward as though about to spring upon his enemy.

The two stood together within a leafy retreat upon the side of the cliff that overhangs the Hudson at West Point, and they were clad in the uniform of cadets from the Military Academy.

With forms as erect as an Indian's, broad shoulders, full cheeks and slender waists they looked the athletes they were.

But unlike wholly were they in face, though each possessing the dark-brown complexion, black hair and eyes of the far Sunny South.

Both were handsome men, for they were across the threshold of twenty-one years, that go to make up the age of manhood; but where the face of the one would win confidence and command esteem, that of the other would denote a cunning, treacherous character.

At the question hissed into his ears Dean Darrington's face did not betray the slightest emotion, while he answered calmly:

"Antonio Dallas, I do refuse to meet one who has just been dismissed from the Academy for conduct unbecoming a gentleman, as it is kindly put, but whom I know to be a thief!"

"Ha! this to my face? Take that!"

And a blow followed the words.

But it never reached the face for which it was intended, as Dean Darrington, on his guard, caught it upon his arm, and in an instant hurled his adversary to the ground, while he said sternly:

"Antonio Dallas, do not push this quarrel with me, I beg of you."

Rising to his feet in a fury, young Dallas cried:

"I shall push this quarrel with you, Darrington, and force you to meet me."

"You are free now, or will be to-morrow, and have nothing to lose, while I have my honor at stake as a cadet, and would be dismissed did I accept your challenge, while, as a Southerner, you should know, Dallas, that a gentleman can only meet a gentleman in a duel."

"Hold on, Dean Darrington, I am armed, and your insulting words may madden me beyond control."

"I have never suspected you of being a coward, Dallas, and can hardly believe you would be guilty of so cowardly an act as to shoot down an unarmed man," was the cool response.

"No; I will not do that, but I will force you to meet me."

"You cannot."

"I can."

Dean Darrington laughed lightly.

"Ah, you may laugh, but you do not know that I hold your secret."

Dean Darrington started, and asked quickly:

"What secret?"

"Aha! you see I hold a trump card, which I can and will play against you, unless you give me the satisfaction I demand."

"I do not understand you, sir."

"Permit me to ask, Cadet Darrington, what the faculty would say did they know that you had a sweetheart living in the village, a fair young girl, a stranger to all here, who receives checks for her board signed by one Dean Darrington, and—"

"Stop! How know you this, Antonio Dallas?"

And the face of Dean Darrington was now white with anger.

"It matters not how I found it out, Cadet Darrington; but know it I do, and if you refuse to meet me as I demand, I will report you to the faculty, so help me Heaven!"

"And if I accept your challenge?" quickly asked Darrington.

"I will depart from West Point without telling your secret."

"Enough. I will meet you, but upon conditions."

"What are your conditions?"

"I suppose you are aware, Dallas, that the death of my father forced me to resign my cadetship, that I might return to my home to care for my invalid mother, and the plantation?"

"I have heard as much."

"Well, I am daily expecting the acceptance of my resignation, and when it comes, and I am no longer a cadet, I will meet you, if you pledge yourself not to divulge the secret your spying nature has enabled you to find out regarding me."

"I make the promise, Darrington, for it is war to the knife between us, as you have been my rival in everything since we have been here, and won my hatred before you discovered I was guilty of deceit to keep some money I had found."

"Deceit? Why you found a sum of money and knew to whom it belonged, and yet meant to keep it, until I threatened to expose you and force you to give it up, and to do such an act is nothing more than to commit a theft," Dean Darrington said with scorn, while he added:

"But, your gambling has run you into debts you could not pay, and your trickery to raise money has cost you your cadetship, so I have nothing to say more than that I pity one who, having an honorable start in life, descends to deeds of dishonor."

"I ask not your pity, Cadet Darrington, and your insult you shall answer for, as I will remain at the hotel in the village until your resignation is accepted. There you will find me, sir," and with a bow Antonio Dallas walked away, leaving his brother cadet standing alone and gazing calmly down upon the beautiful river, here and there dotted with a sail, and whose surface was broken by a steamboat passing swiftly upon its way up-stream.

"Well, I had hoped for an honorable career as a soldier; for an army life I believe I am thoroughly adapted, and I have longed to win rank and fame in the field; but my duty is to my mother. Farewell, therefore, to my dream of service upon the far frontier! Farewell to dear old West Point, and my loved comrades, for all must be given up, and upon the verge almost of triumph, for a few more months and I would have been a full-fledged lieutenant.

"Ah, me! it is a bitter blow, but love and duty both call me to my plantation home in far-away Mississippi, and thither I must go."

"But this duel, which Antonio Dallas forces me into? I cannot now refuse to meet him, for, if I did, he would certainly tell about poor Lucille, and then the secret must come out, so I will have to ask Carter Tennyson to be my second, and he will have to steal out by night so that, if harm comes of the meeting, he must not be known in the affair, as it would cost him his cadetship. But no one else can I ask, so I will go and see him now and ask him; I know he'll be my friend, the noble fellow."

So saying he walked up the pathway to the brow of the high bluff, which jutted boldly out toward the river, and, as he reached the summit there came the clatter of hoofs coming rapidly toward the point where he stood.

"Heavens! who can be such a fool as to ride toward this bluff at such a mad pace?" he cried.

Hardly had the words left his lips when a horse dashed into sight, and upon his back was a rider.

The animal's head was raised high in air, his eyes were glaring, and it was evident that he was flying in mad fright, and wholly beyond the control of the tiny hands that held hard upon the reins in a vain effort to check his speed.

Having left the road and turned along the foot-path leading to the brow of the bluff, the animal seemed blind with terror, and in a moment more would have dashed over the cliff to go down with his rider to death on the rocks far below.

"Save me!"

The cry rung out pleadingly from the lips of the rider of the terrified steed.

With a bound the young cadet threw himself in his way, seized the reins, and with an effort of strength that was remarkable, checked the speed of the horse almost upon the very brink of the precipice.

A loud snort of rage, and the animal was mastered, and stood trembling with dread as he gazed down the dizzy height, while the rider also realizing how near death had been, reeled and fell from the saddle, but was caught in the strong arms of the cadet, just as a horseman dashed up and sprung to the ground with a cry of alarm, followed by the words:

"You have saved my child, my gallant youth, and God bless you for it."

A thrill of joy shot through the heart of Dean Darrington at the words, and he gazed, almost fascinated, down into the face of the one whose life he had saved, and who was a young and beautiful girl of sixteen, more lovely in feature and form than even his most ardent dream of womanhood had believed possible.

"Oh, sir, to save the life of one so beautiful is joy untold to me," he gallantly said, and then thinking of his enthusiastic words he continued, as he saw the lovely eyes open full upon him: "I will run to the hotel for aid."

"No! no! there is no need of it—ah! he is off,"

said the gentleman, as he beheld the cadet bound away like a deer and disappear in the thicket.

The maiden had now recovered from her momentary faintness, and seeing how white was her father's face, she controlled her emotion, and said quickly:

"Father, I am myself again, and not in the least harmed; but I owe my life to that young cadet, for see, we are not ten feet from the edge of the cliff!"

"You do indeed owe your life, Lois, to that noble young man, and he has placed me under a debt I can never repay. But come; let us mount and hasten after him, as he has gone for assistance, and none is needed. I will change your saddle to my horse."

"No, father, the poor animal will not run away again, and who could blame him for his fright, when that tree, which the men were cutting down, fell almost upon him, the branches striking him, and even tearing my skirt."

"My God! I believed you crushed beneath it, Lois, and as soon as I could get around it, came in pursuit; but let us hasten on and overtake that cadet. I must thank him as he deserves, for his daring act, as he risked his life to save yours."

Hastily raising his daughter to her saddle, her horse being now perfectly cowed, the gentleman mounted and the two set off at a canter in pursuit of Dean Darrington.

But the cadet was not overtaken; no one they met had seen him, and, try as he might, Colonel Dorsey Delafield could not discover which one of the corps it was who had saved his daughter's life.

As business called him to New York the next day, he left, with instructions to Lois, who had accompanied him to West Point for a week's visit, to be certain to find out who her preserver was.

But upon his return the hero was still unknown, and no inquiry among the cadets was of the slightest avail, for the mystery remained unsolved, and Lois Delafield left West Point, carrying in her heart the memory of a face she feared she would never see again.

CHAPTER III.

THE DUEL IN THE GRAVEYARD.

WHEN Dean Darrington sped away from the scene, where his courage and strength had saved the life of Lois Delafield, he felt mortified at the remark he had made, and was anxious to get out of view of the piercing eyes of the father of the fair girl.

He had noticed that the maiden was recovering consciousness, and would not longer need his assistance; but still he would hasten on to the hotel and send a carriage after her.

He had not gone very far before he heard the clatter of hoofs behind him, and divining who were coming, he sprung behind a friendly cedar, and, a moment after, Colonel Delafield and Lois, both pale after what they had gone through, rode by at a gallop.

"That lets me out," he muttered, and he continued on his way toward the Military Academy, having been absent on leave for the afternoon by special permission which he had asked, for a letter received that morning had urged that he be at a certain spot at an hour named, as it was important to meet some one there.

Upon his arrival he had found there none other than Antonio Dallas, where he had expected to meet some one else, and the scene that followed the reader has been a witness of.

"Well, I do not regret having gone, as my being there saved the life of that beautiful girl. How strange do circumstances shape themselves in this world! for, called there to arrange a meeting of life and death, I save the life of one who is the most beautiful I ever beheld, and whose image I will carry with me to my grave, be my days few or many."

"Who can she be, I wonder? Her father looks like a soldier, and has the bearing of one of high rank. I have heard it murmured that Colonel Dorsey Delafield, the great Indian-fighter, and his daughter, were spending a few days at the hotel, and I wonder if it is he?"

"Well, I have gotten myself into a scrape with this Antonio Dallas, and must meet him, for it would never do for him to tell what he knows."

So musing as he went along, Dean Darrington reached his quarters, and found there a batch of letters.

One was from the overseer of his plantation, urging his return as soon as possible, as his mother's health was steadily failing.

Another was from his commission merchant in New Orleans, inclosing a check for a sum of money which he had asked for, and the third bore an official look, and was the acceptance of his resignation, though with a kindly letter of regret accompanying, that one who stood at the head of his class, and was so highly esteemed by officers and comrades, should be forced to leave the service.

"Ah, me! I would that it were otherwise; but so it must be."

"Now I must hasten home to my mother with all dispatch; but first to settle this matter with Dallas, and at once."

Leaving his room, the now ex-cadet went in

search of his boon comrade, Carter Tennyson, and finding him, the two held an earnest conversation, the result of which was that an arrangement was made between them to meet at a point designated at ten o'clock that night.

Hastily packing up his traps, Dean Darrington sent them to the hotel, and then bade his officers and comrades farewell; after which he walked down to the village, and sent a note to Antonio Dallas, who had also left the Academy that afternoon, but under far different circumstances from those attending the departure of the Mississippian, for where the one left by honorable resignation, the other did so under dishonor—having been "dismissed."

Having dispatched his note, Dean Darrington sauntered up the village street just at sunset, still dressed in his cadet uniform, which he could not change until he reached New York and sought his tailor.

In the outskirts of the village stood a pretty cottage, surrounded by a flower garden, and presenting an air of cosey comfort that was very inviting.

In the garden, gathering a bouquet of flowers, was a young girl, with golden curls and a face full of sunshine and purity.

Her form was graceful and slender, and her features denoted character beyond her years, which could scarcely be over eighteen.

Upon beholding the cadet approaching, her face flushed, and she advanced toward the gate to meet him, extending her hand frankly, and saying in a voice full of earnestness:

"Oh! I am glad to see you! but how is it that you have dared to come here in daylight?"

"I am no longer a cadet, Lucille, for I resigned, as you know, and my resignation has been accepted, so I am free, though I am sorry to say it."

"For your sake, Dean, I regret it, as I believe you were destined to make a name as a soldier; but your duty to your mother demanded the sacrifice, and you have shown your filial devotion by your act."

"But what will poor Carter do without you, and I, too?"

And the tears came into the beautiful eyes.

"Carter will have to get another chum, and you, Lucille, must write to me often, and remember that if you wish any service done that I can render, you must command me as you would your brother."

"Here, put these bank-bills away, for future reference, as the boys say, and when they are gone there will be others to replace them."

And the young man placed a roll of bank-notes in the tiny hand, while Lucille said impulsively:

"Oh, Dean! how can I ever repay your goodness to me? But, some day, I will do so, and I make no idle promise—What! going so soon?"

"Yes, Lucille, for I have much to do before I depart, and I hope to catch the midnight train down to the city. Good-by, and remember, I am always your friend."

He clasped her hand, but drawing it from his grasp, she threw her arms about his neck and kissed him, and the next instant he had gone, while she sunk down upon the settee before the little cottage and burst into tears.

Down the darkening street of the village to the hotel Dean Darrington wended his way. The supper-bell was sending forth its inviting summons as he approached; but his heart was too full of sadness to care to partake of food, for he was giving up his ambitious hopes, his comrades and all, to return to the life of a planter in the Sunny South.

For a long time he paced the piazza, a cigar between his lips, and, lost in deep reverie, he seemed to forget that the hours were passing swiftly by.

Suddenly he saw a cloaked form come out of the hotel door, and he started and at once sought his room.

For some minutes he was absent, and when he returned a cloak was about his shoulders and he carried a bundle in his arm.

"The boat crosses the river to the train at eleven o'clock, sir," said the hotel porter, as he passed out.

"All right, Scott; I will be there I hope, on time, so don't forget to have my trunk on hand."

And so saying, Dean Darrington slipped a piece of silver into the porter's palm and walked on.

It was a lonely way he took and it led his steps to a place which mankind are wont to avoid by night, for he halted in a spot where slept the dead.

About him were graves, headstones, and here and there a pretentious tomb.

But he was not the only living being in that village of the dead, for near where he had halted were visible in the moonlight three forms, and a voice said in a sneering tone:

"I feared you would disappoint me, Cadet Darrington."

"I never break my word, sir; but I beg pardon for being a few minutes late," was the inquisitive reply.

"It is pardonable to tarry for last farewells from rosy lips," remarked Antonio Dallas with a sneer.

"I came here, sir, to settle our quarrel with steel."

rather than the tongue," hotly responded Dean Darrington.

"As you please, Cadet Darrington."

"I am no longer a cadet, sir, though, as you do, I wear the uniform through necessity until I reach New York and make a change."

"May I ask who you have to act for you, as my friend is here, I see?"

"Yes, and your friend wears a mask, I observe, as though afraid to show his face," sneered Dallas.

"Upon such conditions alone would I allow him to act for me, Mr. Dallas, as you know well his instant dismissal would follow the knowledge of his appearing here as my second."

"Now, sir, my friend is at the service of your second, who, I see, is a sergeant from the Academy, and I trust, for his sake, his coming here will not cause him trouble."

"Mr. Dallas once saved my life, as you know, Mr. Darrington, and when he asked me to be his second to-night, I could not refuse, be the consequences what they might," the sergeant responded.

"I do not blame you, sergeant, under the circumstances, and do not know who else Mr. Dallas could have called upon to serve him; but I hope you will not be known in the matter."

"I hope not, sir; but is the meeting to be with swords?"

"Yes, sergeant, for, as the challenged party, I chose swords; so compare weapons with my second, please."

"I would prefer pistols, Darrington," said Dallas, as the sergeant stepped to the side of the cadet, who wore a black mask that completely shielded his face, and gloves of the same hue.

"Doubtless you desired pistols, Dallas; but I have no wish to kill you, so select swords, it being my prerogative to choose." As Darrington spoke he handed a weapon to the masked cadet.

The swords were measured by the seconds, the principals were placed in position and the weapons handed to them, the sergeant and masked cadet then taking their stands upon either side.

It was a weird sight, those four men assembled there in the village of the dead, the graves upon every side, the white tombstones appearing like grim specters surveying the pitiful scene, and an open, half-dug sepulcher of death near by, as though yawning to receive the one who should fall.

"Gentlemen, are you ready?" came in muffled tones from the masked cadet.

The two adversaries bowed in silence.

"Cross swords!"

With the command the blades came together with a clash that made the sparks fly, and the combat had begun.

Both knew the other well, for they had been rivals in all things since, nearly four years before, they had entered the Military Academy, Dean Darrington from Mississippi and Antonio Dallas from Texas.

In fencing they had often crossed blades, with but slight advantage in favor of Dean Darrington.

Now it was to see, in a battle for life, which would win.

Like statues the grim sergeant and the masked cadet stood by, gazing upon the scene, until both uttered an exclamation, as of alarm, when the blade of Antonio Dallas was struck from his grasp and his breast was at the mercy of Dean Darrington's sword-point!

"Dallas, accept your life at my hands," and Dean Darrington picked up the fallen sword and courteously handed it to his defeated antagonist, who took it, stood an instant in silence, and then said:

"Dean Darrington, I demand a second bout, and with pistols."

"And I refuse, sir," was the stern reply.

"Beware, or I shall make known your secret," was the threatening response.

"It can do me no harm now, Dallas, as I am no longer a cadet, and consequently cannot be dismissed. Good-evening, sir! Good-by, sergeant," and, locking his arm in that of the masked cadet, Dean Darrington walked away, leaving his foe and the sergeant still standing in the little graveyard, the former a prey to most unenviable emotions, for he had been defeated and defied by the one of all others whom he hated most in the world.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BURNING STEAMER.

Up the murky waters of the great Mississippi, that sends its resistless stream swiftly down into the blue waves of the Gulf, one of those superb "floating palaces," as those matchless steamers are called, was making its way.

With volumes of smoke streaming from her lofty smoke-stacks, the blackness of which was relieved by myriads of sparks, the deep breathing of her high-pressure escape-pipes, resounding like the muffled boom of a piece of artillery, the long line of lights from the cabin and state-rooms, the bright glare of the fire in her furnaces, the steamer presented indeed a magnificent appearance as she drove rapidly along.

A chorus of voices, the negro deck-hands were forward singing one of the weird songs of the cotton-field pickers, and the decks were full of

groups listening to the melody or promenading to and fro and enjoying the beautiful scenery by moonlight.

Aft, in the ladies' cabin the sound of a piano was heard, and now and then a burst of boisterous laughter from a noisy group who were telling anecdotes, unmindful of the beauty of the night, the majestic steamer and the picturesque surroundings.

Off from the shores, dotted with the homes of planters, was wafted the perfume of a hundred flowers, and occasionally a group of young people on horseback could be discerned dashing swiftly along in a race with the steamer for half a mile or so.

"There is one of the finest plantations upon the shores of the Mississippi, young lady," said the blunt old pilot at the wheel, turning and addressing a maiden who stood near him, and forming one of half a dozen who had gone up to the pilot-house to enjoy the scene.

As he spoke he pointed to a large mansion, whose white walls were distinctly visible in the moonlight, a few hundred paces back from the river, situated upon a sloping hillside and surrounded by a superb flower-garden and lawn.

In the background, glimmering against the dark wall of forest, were two-score of mossy cottages, the slaves' quarters, and to one side, half a mile away, were the plantation buildings, rising into mid-air and appearing in the moonlight like some old cathedral.

Lights were visible here and there in the spacious mansion which the words of the pilot turned all eyes upon.

"It does indeed seem like a grand house," answered the maiden, her gaze riveted upon the plantation the steamer was approaching in an oblique direction, for the channel here ran from one side of the river to the other.

"It belongs," continued the pilot, "to one of the finest young men I ever knew, and he lives there all alone, for his father and his mother died some year or so ago and left all to him.

"He is as handsome as a picture, generous as a prince, and was educated at West Point Military Academy for a soldier, but resigned and came home to take care of his sick mother.

"He's a bachelor, young lady, but I'll gamble that he wouldn't be so long did he once see your beautiful face, and I only wish he'd been on this trip with us that he might capture you, as I don't like to feel that we won't see you this way any more."

And the old white-haired pilot, honest in his admiration of the beautiful girl who had often visited the pilot-house on the run up the river, failed to see the blushes he had brought into the lovely face.

"I am sorry my father cannot be on deck to enjoy the beauty of the night," said the maiden, hastily, anxious to change the subject.

"I hope the colonel's improving, miss," said the pilot.

"Yes, though slowly; but when we get home to New York, and he will not have to be moved any more, he will improve rapidly, I think."

"It was a bad wound them Comanches gave him, I have heard, miss?"

"Yes, my father has been stationed in Texas the past year, and in a battle with the Comanches a few weeks ago he was twice wounded, and—"

"Fire! Fire! the steamer's on fire!"

The wild cry appalled all who heard it, and hardly had the alarm died from the lips that gave it ere there arose shrieks of terror from women and children, the hoarse shouts of men, and the stern orders of the officers.

"Down below for your lives, all!"

"I will head for the shore and hold her there!"

"Don't forget your father, miss!" cried the brave pilot, thinking of the wounded officer in that mad moment of terror, and forgetful of self, determined to stand at his post to do his duty by others.

Out of the pilot-house rushed the group that had been there, and down the steep steps sped the maiden, her face white, her lips set, but firm resolve rather than fright resting upon her beautiful face.

Forward the flames were roaring terrifically, and already bursting up above the decks, while beyond them a maddened, panic-stricken mass of humanity were shrieking for help, calling upon high heaven to save them, or springing into the waters to meet a death less terrible.

Standing at his post, firm as a rock, the pilot headed straight for the shore, at a point just below the elegant plantation which he had pointed out as one of the finest upon the river.

He kept the loud-mouthed whistle blowing an appeal for help from the shore, and the deep-toned bell of the steamer tolling rapidly, to arouse all along the shore.

With all steam turned on, her crew driven from their posts below, her bows crowded, the flames infolding her amidships, and a hundred helpless beings aft, the noble steamer, looking like some huge living monster from the regions infernal, rushed with terrific speed toward the shore, held on her course by the one man in the pilot-house, which was already growing intolerable from the fierce approach of the flames.

Suddenly there was a shock which threw all to their feet; it was the steamer crossing a bar;

but she got safely over, yet still dragging on the bottom, and then, with a crash that sent her lofty smoke-stacks down, she ran her bows ashore.

But the rebound was so great that she drew off, was seized by the swift current, and went drifting, a helpless mass, down the stream.

The pilot had done his duty, and could do no more, so he sprung from the dizzy height into the river, sunk, arose, and struck out for the shore.

Others, too, had sprung into the river, or been thrown there by the shock, while many more had been overpowered by the heat, and had fallen victims to the flames.

Along the shore the plantation bells were ringing loud alarms, and planters and slaves were hastening to the river-bank to behold the awful spectacle, and do all in their power to save human life.

Suddenly, out from the bank shot a small boat and in it were two persons.

One was a white man, the other a negro, and they sent it along with a speed that was marvelous.

Straight to the stern of the burning steamer, borne along by the current, the boat went, and one of its two occupants sprung on board.

"Anchor, take them ashore as fast as you can fill your boat, while I take a look into the cabins," cried the white man, who was dressed in a suit of white duck, and wore a Panama straw hat upon his head.

"Yes, massa," answered the negro, beginning to aid into the boat the few who stood on the lower deck aft.

Up to the deck above the white man climbed, into the cabin he dashed, and the sight that met his gaze was heart-rending.

Women and children were there, some of them lying unconscious from fright, others shrieking for help, others praying, while strong men were equally as helpless, seemingly dazed by the situation of helplessness in which they found themselves.

"Out upon the rear guards, all of you!"

"Boats are coming off to the rescue, and you had better drown than burn to death."

"To the stern g'ards all of you!" cried the bold rescuer, in a voice that rung like a trumpet, and his words acted like an electric shock upon the helpless mortals, for they rushed toward the stern, dashed through the state-rooms, and fled from the cabin, which was rapidly becoming a fiery furnace, as the whole steamer amidships was one mass of flames.

"Oh, sir! is there no hope for my poor father?"

The words were uttered by the young girl who had been in the pilot-house when the fire broke out, and she was standing, with clasped hands and appealing face, in the door of a large state-room.

As she addressed the daring rescuer, who was dashing in the state-room doors, to see if they held occupants, the eyes of the two met, and in words that fairly reached a shriek, the maiden cried:

"Father! we are saved! for here is that brave West Point cadet, and he will not let us die!"

CHAPTER V.

THE RESCUE.

SHORTLY before the alarm of fire rung through the Mississippi steamer, a man of fine presence lay at full length upon a cot in one of the state-rooms opening into the ladies' cabin.

A glance into his face, though upon it the seal of suffering rested, and it was very pale, revealed to the reader the horseman who had appeared upon the bluff at West Point, so soon after his daughter had been saved from death by the young cadet.

It was Colonel Dorsey Delafield, a man of wealth, a gallant officer of the United States army, and returning to his New York home from his regiment in Texas, where he had been severely wounded in a battle with Comanche Indians.

Accompanying him was his beautiful daughter, who had hastened to him on the frontier post, as soon as she had heard of his being wounded, and the two were on their way to their Northern home, accompanied by the colonel's valet, an irrepressible Irishman, who bore the name of O'Gorman O'Toole.

The valet had gone forward to listen to the singing of the deck-hands, while Lois, at her father's request, had ascended to the deck with a group of fellow-travelers, to enjoy the beauty of the night, and thus the colonel was left alone in his state-room, and lay glancing out through the door opening upon the guards, at the moonlit shores.

Suddenly the cry of fire reached his ears, and his pale face became livid.

He was helpless, wounded as he was, and could be of no service to himself, or his lovely daughter, toward whom his thoughts now turned in the anguish of despair.

His left leg was in splints, having been broken by the fall of his horse upon him, shot down at the moment the colonel had received a bullet in his shoulder, and thus he was at the mercy of the flames.

Loud rung the cry of fire, wilder rose the

shrieks of the panic-stricken passengers, feet pat-ttered overhead, men rushed hither and thither, and no one thought of the wounded officer.

"My poor child! God save her from the awful death that I am doomed to meet!" groaned Colonel Delafield.

But as he uttered the fervent prayer the dutiful child bounded into the state-room.

"Father! there is no escape for us, and we must die together," she cried as she threw herself by his side.

"No, no, Lois, my noble child, you can find some avenue of escape, so leave me and save yourself, I implore you, I command you!"

"Never! Did I have the strength I would bear you away from this room to the outer guards; but, alas! I can do nothing; scores are being burned up, others are throwing themselves overboard to perish in the river, and still more are clinging to the steamer praying, hoping, despairing, and here by your side, father, I live or die," and Lois dropped upon her knees and clasped her hands, raising her eyes and voice in supplication to Heaven.

Suddenly a ringing voice, devoid of all fear even in that awful moment, commanding and earnest, fell upon her ears, and she sprung to her feet.

There was one face that she had seen but once, and yet it was indelibly stamped upon her brain and heart.

She had seen it then but for a few moments, but it was at a time when her life hung by a thread, and she had been saved from a fearful death.

Every face in the cadet corps of West Point she had almost rudely scanned, as had her father, in search of the one she so longed once more to meet; but in vain, for she beheld it not, and wondering why one who had so served her made himself not known, she had departed for her home, but to bear in her memory the handsome, manly countenance of a young soldier whom she could never forget.

Now, as she sprung to the state-room door, as the voice of command and hope rung through the cabin, she once more beheld the face that was imaged in her inmost heart.

No longer wearing the cadet uniform, but in the *negligé* dress of a planter, Lois Delafield yet recognized the man to whom once before she had owed her life, and from her lips broke the words that close the foregoing chapter.

The voice of the maiden turned the gaze of the young planter upon her, and as his dark eyes met her own the recognition was instantaneous, and he uttered an exclamation of joy as he bounded toward her, for he too had carried in his heart her image since that day upon the West Point bluff.

"My God! you here, and in this awful peril?" he cried.

"Yes, and my father is wounded and helpless—see!"

She sprung away from the state-room door and the young planter entered.

"Ah, sir! I am sorry to find you helpless; but, have no fear, for I can save you," he said, in cheery tones.

"If man can save us you can, my brave sir," earnestly responded Colonel Delafield, while he added:

"But I am a heavy weight and helpless, so save my child, I beg of you, and leave me to my fate."

"No, sir, for a helpless man is to be remembered as should a woman be."

"I will save you, sir, and your daughter can aid me," and bending over, with a strength that seemed herculean the young planter raised the wounded officer in his arms and stepped out upon the guard, saying simply to Lois:

"Come!"

The scene without was grandly magnificent, but sublimely appalling, for the red glare of the burning steamer illuminated the river and shore far and wide, and boats were putting off from the shores, manned by the negroes, commanded by their masters, to be of what service they could.

Down the stream drifted the avalanche of fire, the fierce flames steadily gaining headway, driving the crowds gathered forward and aft to spring into the river as the heat grew too intense, to be picked up by boats, or perish, as the case might be.

Coming toward the steamer was a small boat and at the oars a negro.

It was the gallant black who had accompanied the young planter, and he was pulling with a tremendous stroke, having made two trips to the bank with a load of unfortunates.

He had each time taken women and children, refusing to allow men to go into the boat, while those who were utterly helpless to aid themselves appealed to him to save them.

"Ho, Anchor, bring your boat alongside here!" called out the young planter, who stood on the guards, supporting the form of the wounded officer in his strong arms, while Lois stood near, grasping in her hands a sachet of valuables and papers of importance which she had hastily collected from her trunks.

"Yes, massa, I is coming," was the answer, and the negro pulled toward the spot indicated, while a chorus of cries went up from the crowd

of men upon the stern of the steamer for him to come to their aid.

When the young planter had mounted to the cabin deck of the steamer he had carried around his shoulders a coil of stout rope, which he had brought with him from the boat-house ashore, and placing Colonel Delafield in a chair, he hastily made a noose, slipped it under his arms, and prepared to lower him into the skiff, when the officer said firmly:

"My child must go first, sir."

"No, she shall follow you, sir," and having snapped one end of the rope about a stanchion, the planter swung the wounded officer over the guard, and called out:

"Ho, Anchor! be ready to receive this gentleman."

"All right, massa, but these men is crowding me, sah," and the negro pointed to a crowd upon the lower deck, who stood ready to spring into the boat when he should approach nearer.

"Beat them back with your oars if they attempt it."

"Ho, men! are you cowards, to save yourselves when women demand your succor?" cried the planter from above.

But the men were mad with fear, and seeing that they would spring into the boat and sink it, the planter threw the end of the rope he held over to the deck below, and said:

"I must drive those devils back, sir, or all of us will be lost."

"I can lower you from the deck as well as from here, if your daughter will hold the rope firmly until I get down, and then you can follow, miss, if you do not fear to come down unaided."

"I have no fear now, sir," was the calm reply, and getting over the guard railing, the planter seized one end of the rope and slipped rapidly down to the deck below, leaving the wounded officer still suspended in the air.

"Men, you must give back here!" he said, firmly, turning upon the group of deck-hands who were gathered about the guard, waiting for the boat with the negro to approach.

"Our lives are as dear as is yours," said a burly fellow, gruffly.

"It is not far to the shore; jump overboard and swim there."

"We can't swim."

"Then drown, for such cowards as you are had better be dead," was the sneering response of the planter, and then he added:

"I warn you not to press me too closely, for I am not to be trifled with. Back and give me room!"

But the crowd did not move.

"Ho, men, we but lose time, and you must obey. Back, all of you!" and suddenly a revolver flashed before their eyes, held in a hand that was firm as iron.

With a cry of alarm the crowd gave back, and letting his end of the rope slide through his left hand, while he still held the pistol in his right, he lowered the wounded officer to the deck, swung him clear of the lower guard, and Anchor received him in his arms, placing him gently in the stern.

"Now, miss, it is your turn," called out the planter, and back came the cheery answer:

"I am ready, sir!"

At the same moment Lois Delafield swung herself free of the guard and began to descend the rope, while the crowd of frightened deck-hands, who had been held at bay by the pistol, now made a rush, as they saw the planter return the weapon to his pocket.

It was a most critical moment, for did the crowd spring into the boat they would swamp or capsize it, and would be lost, for a glance showed that the steamer was drifting further from the shore, and that few boats dared approach it, for it was now one mass of flame forward and amidships, and the fire was gaining its way toward the stern, though fortunately the wind was in their favor.

"Back, or I fire!" came in trumpet tones from the young planter, as he held the rope supporting Lois with one hand, and again leveled his revolver with the other.

"Hurl him overboard!" was the answering cry, and the maddened gang pressed on in one solid mass.

"Heaven forgive me! but it is our only hope!" cried the young planter, and the ring of his revolver followed his words.

Down dropped a man at the crack of his revolver, and the crowd uttered a wild cry of alarm and hesitated an instant, but again moved on, and once more a shot rung out, and a man fell his length, rolling to the very feet of the daring man at bay.

Again the revolver was cocked and raised, and then the crowd broke, pell-mell, for certain death faced them before that steady hand and deadly aim.

"Thank God!" came fervently from the lips of the planter, and in an instant almost he had lowered Lois into the skiff, and she had taken a seat by her father.

"Now, men, there is room for half a dozen of you, so come on!"

They came with a rush, and again the revolver was leveled to hold them in check, while one by one they were told to enter the boat.

"Will she hold any more, Anchor?"

"Only you, massa."

"Then I will give you my place, my man," and the young planter turned to a negro deck-hand, whose ashen hue told how frightened he was.

"Gor' bress you, massa! Gor' bress you, sah!" came the trembling response, as the negro went over the side into the boat, while Colonel Delafield called out:

"For God's sake, sir, do not you intend to go?"

"Anchor will come back for me, sir," was the quiet reply.

"It will be too late then."

"If the heat becomes too great I can swim ashore."

"Pull hard for the bank, Anchor, and send any boat here that dare come," cried the planter, and the negro pulled away, leaving the young planter and a dozen more grouped together upon the burning steamer.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PLANTER AND HIS GUESTS.

As the boat touched the bank the first one to meet it was Frank Fathom, the old pilot, and the tears stood in his eyes as he said:

"Thank God, miss, that you are saved! and saved by my young hero, too, the planter of Rest Haven, and it's not the first time he's saved life either."

"I saw all, for that fire lights up everything; but let me help your father, miss," and the old pilot, dripping wet himself, having aided Lois ashore, took hold of the colonel with Anchor, and lifted him tenderly out upon the grassy bank.

"Say, boy, you see to getting the gentleman and young lady up to the plantation-house, and I'll take the boat back for your brave young master," and the old pilot sprung into the skiff and seized the oars, while Lois called out pleadingly:

"Oh, sir, do not delay, I pray you!"

"Never fear, miss, I'll fetch him back," and the pilot sent the boat flying over the waters.

It was a weird, a grandly picturesque sight now, for the burning steamer was drifting slowly down the river, sending flames far into the heavens, and illuminating the shores upon either side as brightly as would vivid flashes of lightning.

Along the shores, in front of the plantation-houses, were gathered groups of slaves, with here and there the planters' families among them.

Out upon the river were half a dozen boats, manned by whites and blacks, going as near the burning steamer as the heat would permit, and urging by voice and gesture the crowd gathered upon one side, abaft the starboard wheel-house, to shield themselves from the heat, to spring into the river.

The steamer was drifting stern foremost down the stream, the wind blowing up the river driving the flames forward, though the heat was intense to those gathered there, awaiting rescue or death.

In the midst of this group stood the young planter, trying to force those who could swim to take the risk of reaching the boats, or the shore, and cheering up those who could not with the hope of rescue.

Straight toward them the old pilot pulled with rapid stroke.

Hotter and hotter it grew for him, but taking up a blanket, which Lois had thrown into the boat for her father, he drew it over his head and rowed on.

The next moment he had reached the gunwale, and, checking the mad rush of the crowd, as before, the young planter made them enter the boat one by one, until it was crowded, and yet several remained.

"You who can swim, must get out," sternly said the planter.

"Yes, overboard with you," echoed the pilot.

"We dare not trust ourselves," said one, "to swim so far."

"Then hold on to the boat's gunwale; but overboard you must go," and the planter showed that he was in earnest.

Thus room was made in the boat for those who could not swim, and it was loaded down deep.

"She must bear you," said the pilot, turning to the planter, who still stood on the steamer.

"No, I will swim ashore," and he plunged, head-first, in' o the river.

When he arose to the surface he was far away from the steamer, and the boat was not far distant, and the pilot pulling with all his might, while the half-dozen men overboard and clinging to the sides, were aiding all in their power, as the heat was still intense.

Rapidly the young planter swam shoreward, landing several hundred yards below where he saw by the light from the burning steamer, the form of Lois Delafield, still standing upon the bank, her father lying upon the grass near by, and Anchor, the brave negro, eagerly watching the approaching boat for a sight of his master.

Dripping wet, the planter walked rapidly along the shore until he came upon Anchor, who sprung forward with a cry of joy and grasped his hand, while he said:

The Two Flags.

"Oh, massa! I didn't see you in the boat, and I feared you was dead."

"No, Anchor, I am safe, as you see; but the gentleman and lady?"

"Are there, sah, and most anxious about you."

"I sent Warren for the carriage, massa, and I guess the house will be pretty full to-night, sah."

"You have done well, Anchor, as you always do; but there comes an up-bound steamer, and she will carry many on with her—see! how she runs for the other shore to escape the burning boat?"

"But all are welcome whom we can care for, so invite them one and all up to Rest Haven, Anchor," and so saying the young planter passed on, waved his hand to the pilot, who was slowly coming shoreward, and then joined Lois Delafield and her father, who were gazing sadly upon the scene.

Lois stepped toward him and grasped both his hands in silence.

She dared not attempt to trust herself to utter a word, and her silence was more impressive than words could have been.

"I am so happy to see you are safe, miss, and your father, I hope, has not suffered much by his rude removal from the steamer," and the planter stepped forward and grasped the outstretched hand of the wounded officer, who said in a voice that shook with deep feeling:

"Again, sir, do you place my child and myself under obligations that cannot be paid, for, if I mistake not, you saved my daughter from death when you were a cadet at West Point?" and the colonel gazed fixedly into the face of the young man, who answered:

"Yes, sir, I was so fortunate as to be near at a time when I could serve your daughter, in her runaway at West Point."

"But why did you hide yourself from us so mysteriously?"

"I had resigned, sir, and left the Academy the very night of the occurrence; but you must not remain here, as I shall claim you for my guests at Rest Haven, for my carriage is coming, I see."

"I fear your hospitality will be taxed to the utmost, sir, as there are many here to be cared for."

"A number will doubtless continue on their way in yonder upbound steamer, while my fellow planters will look to the comfort of others."

"But, oh! what a fearful loss of life," cried Lois, with feeling.

"Yes, many have perished; but I thank Heaven many more have escaped."

"To you and your gallant slave, sir, many owe their lives," the colonel responded, while, as the carriage just then drove up, he continued:

"My name is Dorsey Delafield, sir, and I am an officer of the United States army, having just left my command in Texas on wounded leave."

"I know you well, Colonel Delafield, by reputation, and have read of your late distinguished services on the border."

"My name is Dean Darrington, my home is yonder, and I am more than happy to claim yourself and daughter as my guests."

"Come, Anchor, aid me here," and the negro springing forward, the wounded officer was placed in the open carriage, Dean Darrington assisting Lois to a seat by her father, while he sprung upon the box with the driver, after calling out to Anchor that he would return for others in a short while.

With the red glare of the burning steamer still lighting up the scene far and wide, Lois saw, as the carriage rolled through the massive arched gateway into the grounds, a superb mansion, surrounded by *parterres* of flowers, ornamental trees, and with arbors, bowers and rustic seats adding beauty to the scene and inviting to shady retreats by day from the heat of the sun.

A liveried servant met the carriage as it rolled up to the stone steps beneath the *porte cochere*, and Colonel Delafield was at once borne into a large and superbly-furnished room upon the second floor, while a negress conducted Lois to an equally elegant chamber across the hall.

Entering her father's room, Lois found that their young host had appointed a negro as nurse for the colonel, and gone back to the river after other unfortunates.

As her father had been comfortably ensconced in bed, Lois took her stand by the window and gazed out upon the scene.

Afar down the river the steamer was still drifting and burning, and the firelight was fading in brightness, while the moon was resuming her sway, for its light had been paled by the red glare.

A large steamer lay at the bank, and crowds were visible about her, while small boats were visible upon the river pulling to and fro.

Refreshments were then brought into the room by a negro servant, and the father and daughter ate lightly, for their thoughts were with their fellow-sufferers and those who had lost their lives in the holocaust that had so suddenly come upon them.

Soon the sound of carriage-wheels was heard, and springing to the window Lois saw the young planter alight, and he was alone.

A glance toward the river showed her that the steamer was backing off, to continue on her

way up the river, bearing most of those who had been passengers on the burned boat, while a few others were returning with the hospitable planters who had invited them to their homes.

Just then a servant entered to see if Colonel Delafield would see his master, and the young planter entered a moment after.

In a few words he told all that had been done for the unfortunates, and then bidding his guests feel that the mansion was their home, he bade them good-night and retired to his own pleasant room.

Lighting a cigar he paced to and fro, while his face wore a commingled sadness and joy, for he felt sorrow for the victims of the burned steamer, and gladness was in his breast that he had again met one whose image he had ever carried in his memory since the day he had saved her life upon the bluff at West Point.

Again they had met, and she, whom he had never expected to meet again had crossed his path, and once more she owed her life to him, and her father, too, he had saved from an awful death.

Was it Fate that had thus thrown them together again?

Was it to bring sorrow upon his life to have him meet her again, when, perhaps, she was pledged to another, perhaps was in love with another?

It was a jealous fear, and the thought was madness to him, and long was it before he could sleep, as the specter, ever grim, of unrequited love was before him to drive slumber from his eyelids.

The morning broke calm and beautiful, and Anchor had every trace of charred timber from the wreck removed by the rising of the sun, while the dead, burned and drowned, had been borne by the swiftly-flowing river far down the stream.

So the scene that met the gaze of Lois Delafield, when the negress threw open the blinds of her windows, was one of calm beauty.

For an instant she knew not where she was, and then the bitter memories of the night flashed upon her, and springing from her bed she approached the window.

All was calmly beautiful without, and it was hard to picture the appalling scene of the night before.

"How is my father?" she quickly asked.

"He all right, missy, so Tampa tell me," answered Kittie, a bright mulattress, whom Dean Darrington had told to act as maid to his fair guest.

"And your master?" asked Lois, with a blush.

"He all right too, missy, for nothin' hurts Massa Dean."

"Where are the rest of his family?" asked Lois, as Kittie aided her to dress, and her curiosity about the young planter was pardonable.

"He hain't got no kinfolks here, missy, for his ma died little over a year ago, and his pa just afore her, and that's what made Massa Dean give up the army and come home, for old miss was failin' in health, and he was awful good son, missy, and good massa too, for there hain't no better on the river."

Lois listened to Kittie run on about her young master with real pleasure, and then said:

"Well, Kittie, my father and myself owe him our lives, and once before, when he was a cadet at West Point, he saved me from death."

"Lor', missy, I done heard Massa Dean tell old miss that he saved the life of the sweetest lady he ever seen, the very day he left West Point, and he was afeard he would never see her any more; but I is awful glad he has seen you, missy, and I does hope you'll be our mist'ess, for you is so lovely, and all of us will love you, missy."

Lois turned crimson at this direct way Kittie had of arranging for a wife for her young master, and her toilet being completed she beat a hasty retreat into her father's room, who greeted her affectionately and commented upon her looking so well.

Lois knew that she was blushing, and hastily inquired about her father's health, and was delighted to know that he felt none the worse for the adventure of the past night.

"Our noble host had his physician here to see me half an hour ago, Lois, and my wounds have been nicely dressed, so that I feel most comfortable; but go down to breakfast, as Mr. Darrington is awaiting you, and it will have to be a *tête-à-tête* affair, for Tampa will serve me here."

Lois at once descended to the breakfast-room, where Dean Darrington sat looking over his mail, which had arrived by a passing steamer.

He arose and greeted her with courtly grace, asked her to take the head of the table, expressing himself as delighted to be so honored, and then telling her the glad tidings that her father's *valet*, O'Gorman O'Toole, had also escaped from the burning steamer and was then at an adjoining plantation, where he had already been sent for to come to his master and Rest Haven.

"Poor O'Toole, he must have been frightened half out of his wits, and I am so glad to know that he has escaped," answered Lois.

Soon after O'Toole arrived in the spring-

wagon, which Dean Darrington had sent for him.

He was a red-headed, comical-faced Irishman, with a rich brogue, sly humor, and the look of one who would be faithful unto death to one he loved.

Crossing himself devoutly, as he offered prayers of thanks, he dropped upon his knees before Lois and seizing her hand kissed it respectfully, while he cried earnestly:

"Glory be to gracious goodness, Mish Lois, but I'm glad I is to say your sw'ate face ag'in.

"But where is your blessed father after being this minute?"

Dean directed him to the colonel's room, and O'Toole sprung away like a deer, and instantly usurped Tampa's place as nurse to his master, the negro beating a retreat before the wild Irishman with the remark:

"Dat man am crazy, I reckons, fer he don't look right in his head."

Thus a week passed away, and Colonel Delafield was sufficiently improved to continue on his way northward to his home in New York, and it was with a sad heart that Dean Darrington stood on the bank and saw the steamer bear away one who had become dearer to him than his life.

But then he had promised to visit the North in the spring, and hoped then to receive from the lips of Lois Delafield the sweet assurance that his was not a hopeless love.

CHAPTER VII.

LOVE AND DUTY.

SEVERAL months have passed away since the burning of the Mississippi steamer, whereon so many valuable lives were lost, and, but for the daring of the ex-cadet, Dean Darrington, Colonel Delafield and his beautiful daughter would have met a fearful doom.

In an elegant mansion of the city of New York, one dismal, rainy afternoon in early spring, a maiden was seated, gazing out upon the scene with the air of one who was lost in deepest reverie, and that her thoughts were not altogether of a pleasant nature was shown by the tightly-compressed lips and lowering brow.

Her face was of that darkly bronzed hue that is common among the daughters of the far Sunny South; but it was very beautiful withal, and her form was willowy and graceful.

In her hand she tightly clasped a letter, and, as her dark, lustrous eyes fell upon it now and then, they flashed fire as though with some memory called up by the bit of paper.

After being buried in deepest reverie for some time, while the driving rain beat silently upon the window-pane, she slowly opened the letter, the seal of which had already been broken, and glanced at its contents, while she murmured:

"I had hoped that his path and mine would never cross again in this life; but it seems that even here in New York I cannot escape his baleful presence."

"I knew him the moment I saw him at the theater last night, and my heart grew cold as he entered our box and I saw that he was acquainted with Lois, and Colonel Delafield introduced him as his friend.

"Now he writes me that he will call this afternoon, to see me, and alone."

For some moments the maiden remained silent, and then added:

"And I dare not refuse to see him— Ah! there he is now."

And the color fled from her face as a hack drove up to the door, and from it alighted a tall, handsome man.

His face was very dark as were also his hair and eyes, his bearing was that of a soldier, and a dark mustache covered his lip; but, though changed by several years that have passed over his head since the reader last beheld him, he cannot fail to recognize Antonio Dallas, the West Point cadet that was dismissed for his wild career there.

Ushered into the grand parlors by a servant, he bowed in a courtly way as he beheld the maiden there and said, as she arose to meet him, her face pale and manner cold:

"We meet again, Miss Mortimer, after a separation of two years."

"It is not by my wish that it is so, Captain Dallas," was the reply.

"Doubtless, my sweet Grace, for I saw when the colonel presented me to you at the theater last night, believing us to be strangers, that you had not gotten over your old hatred for me."

"Nor ever will I, and I would ask, Antonio Dallas, why you seek me now, when I had hoped that our paths in life would never cross again?"

"I have sought you for a purpose, Grace, which I must explain; but first let me ask you: have you married again, since we parted on the Rio Grande two years ago?"

"Can you believe me so base, Antonio Dallas, as to go through the mockery of a marriage with one man, when I am bound to another?" she asked, with indignation.

"I do not know what a woman would do, and especially you, Grace."

"I left you poor, penniless and among strangers; but I find you, two years after, dressing

with elegance, wearing jewels, and living in this princely home.

"Pray explain," and the man's manner was sneering.

"Yes, you left me destitute, Antonio Dallas; but Heaven raised up to me a noble friend in Colonel Delafield, whom I met while he was visiting the family of a Texan ranchero, where I had obtained employment as a governess.

"He brought his daughter to see me, and we became firm friends, and it was near the ranch where I lived that the battle with the Indians was fought, in which Colonel Delafield was wounded, and his horse, being shot, fell upon him, breaking his leg.

"I saw it from the window, and as his troopers were driven back, I ran out and succeeded in saving him from capture by the Indians, or death at their hands, for you remember the chief owed my father many favors, and recognizing me, spared the colonel's life through my entreaty.

"For weeks, until Miss Delafield arrived, I was the colonel's nurse, and when they came North they made me promise to come to them as soon as I had completed my term as governess.

"This promise I kept, and I am now acting as companion to Lois, who is as a sister to me, while her father treats me as though I were his own child."

"Did they know all, do you think they would so treat you, Grace Mortimer?" sneered the man, when the woman, in an impassioned tone, had told her story.

"Alas no! but I may wrong them, for they have noble hearts."

"You have your eye doubtless upon the colonel as a good catch, for he is only about forty-six, I believe, handsome, holds high rank in the army, and is, best of all, a man of great wealth."

"You forget that I cannot marry, sir," she said, haughtily.

"I forgot nothing, Miss Mortimer, for you are welcome to do as I intend to do."

"And what is that, sir?"

"Marry."

"You marry?" and her large eyes dilated in amazement.

"Yes: why not?"

"Antonio Dallas, you are already married."

"Oh, yes, I was fool enough two years ago to marry a young girl, whom I believed to be rich, for I believed what her old father told me, and she was equally deceived into a marriage with me, under the belief that I was possessed of a large fortune, and—"

"Do not say that she sold herself for gold, for it is not so, as she sacrificed herself to save her father."

"As you please, Grace; but both found out their mistake, and a separation followed, and I prefer to consider that as a divorce, and having met the fair Lois in Texas, where I commanded the Rangers, who so ably supported her father's command, and having loved her, I have come on here to ask her to be my wife."

"Antonio Dallas, you are a far greater villain than I believed you," fiercely said the woman.

"You think so, Grace; but you do not half know me, and I warn you to keep clear of my way, for I wish no one to stand between my getting Lois Delafield," and the tone of the man was threatening.

"I will do so, Antonio Dallas."

"Ha! do you threaten me?"

"I do, for I am not one to stand idly by and see one whom I love, as I do Lois Delafield, allied to such a base creature as you are."

"No, no, never will I do so vile a wrong, Antonio Dallas," and her dark eyes flashed and her bosom heaved with emotion as she uttered the words.

"Woman!" and the man grasped her arm with a grip she could not shake off, while he fairly hissed the words: "Woman, have you forgotten what I remember?"

"Have you forgotten that I know where your father, a fugitive from the gallows, is now hiding, and that one word from me will find him out and lead him to an ignominious death?"

"A pitiable sight he will be as he mounts the gallows to die at the rope-end for a murder he committed."

"No, no; felon, fugitive from justice though he is, you love him too well to sacrifice him, and so you will keep that tongue of yours between your pretty teeth and see me do as I like, or you will be answerable for your father's life."

"Speak! will you have aught to say against me, Grace, or will you remain silent?"

"I await your answer, speak!"

Ere reply could be made the parlor door was thrown open, and in walked two persons.

One was Lois Delafield in riding costume and whip in hand, and the other was Dean Darrington.

"Oh, Grace, we got caught in the rain at Yonkers, so had to take refuge in a hotel, and get a carriage to bring us back; but pardon me, Captain Dallas, you were hidden by the *portières*, and I thought Miss Mortimer was alone."

"No, Miss Delafield, I called upon you, and have been delightfully entertained by Miss

Mortimer in your absence," and Antonio Dallas bowed.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Dallas; but permit me to present to you Mr. Dean Darrington, of Mississippi."

"Dean Darrington!"

"Antonio Dallas!"

Each man uttered the name of the other, and their eyes met, while the young planter said, coldly:

"I have met Mr. Dallas before, for we were cadets together at West Point; but I did not know that he was an acquaintance of yours, Miss Delafield."

"Oh, yes, Dean; we met a year and a half ago, when I visited my father there, and Captain Dallas rendered good service as commander of the Rangers."

"And so you were cadets together?"

"Why, Captain Dallas, you never told me that you were a West Pointer, and father will be surprised to know it."

"I did not consider it necessary, Miss Delafield, as I left West Point under a cloud, having led a somewhat wild career while there; and you too left under like circumstances I believe, Darrington?"

And with cool effrontery the Texan turned to the young planter, who answered sternly, and with cutting emphasis:

"No, Dallas, I left by an honorable resignation, you by a dishonorable dismissal."

"Oh, Dean, you are severe; but, Captain Dallas, you must not quarrel with him, as he is my property now, for, Grace, I might as well frankly own it, Mr. Darrington and myself are engaged."

And Lois spoke with a *naïveté* and frankness that was charming.

"Thank God!" came fervently from the lips of Grace Mortimer.

Antonio Dallas's face grew white, and through his shut lips was hissed something strangely like an oath, while Dean Darrington, taking the hand of Lois, said impressively:

"Yes, Miss Mortimer, Lois has promised me this little hand, as she says she has already given me her heart, knowing how wholly my love is her own."

"And Heaven bless and have mercy upon you both!" said a deep, stern voice behind them, and Colonel Delafield entered the room.

All started as they beheld his face, for it was strangely white and sad, and Lois sprung to his side, crying:

"Father, are you ill?"

"Quick, tell me what has happened to so move you?"

"My child," and the voice of Colonel Delafield was deeply impressive:

"You have just pledged your love and hand to one whose sense of honor, as a Southerner, I fear will make you his foe, for to-day has the cloud hovering over our loved land broken in fury, and the tocsin of war has been sounded between the North and South, and a long, cruel struggle must follow."

"Alas, Dean! that war should be declared between your people of the South and mine of the North; but you surely will not take up arms against the Government?"

And Lois laid her hand upon the arm of the young planter, and gazed earnestly up into his face.

"Lois, would you have me remain a craven here in the North, when my people, my kindred, my State demand the weight of my sword in the South?"

"With love on the one hand, and duty on the other, which shall I choose?"

An impressive silence of an instant, and then Lois spoke firmly, though there was in her face a look of bitter anguish:

"Duty, Dean, though hearts should break."

"The reply I expected from a soldier's daughter," said Darrington, with a look of admiration.

"The answer I expected from my daughter; but you do mean, Darrington, to throw your sword with the South?" earnestly said Colonel Delafield.

"Yes, sir, I have been so educated as to feel that my duty lies with my State before all things."

"I have hoped that this war-cloud would drift by, and that our land would not be stained with a civil war."

"But it cannot be, and as you go to your command to march against the South, Colonel Delafield, so do I return to my home and don the uniform of a defender of the South, and now I bid you farewell, perhaps a last farewell."

With a cry of anguish wrung from her inmost heart, Lois sprung forward, crying:

"No! no! no! you shall not go!"

But he had gone, and with a despairing moan Lois Delafield fell in a heap upon the velvet carpet.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ASSASSIN.

"SEÑOR, you sent for me?" and the speaker entered the room of the St. James Hotel, in New Orleans, where sat a dark-faced, handsome

young man, whose brow was contracted and mouth stern, as though the thoughts that were flitting through his brain were anything but pleasant.

About him was evidence that he had lived a life of luxury, and spent his money freely to gain it.

A box of Havana cigars was open upon the table, and beside it were decanters of liquor and glasses.

He wore a handsome silk smoking-cap, embroidered slippers and dressing-gown, and did not rise as his visitor entered in answer to his knock.

That visitor was a foreigner, as his face indicated, and his look was evil, cunning and vicious.

"Yes, Soto, I did, for I wished once more to gaze upon that wicked face of yours," was the rude reply.

"And to seek my aid as well," was the retort, as the man came forward and dropped into an easy-chair, while he turned to the table and poured out a glass of wine unasked, at the same time appropriating a cigar, all uninverted.

The handsome occupant of the room bit his lips with vexation, but he did not rebuke his free-and-easy visitor for making himself so wholly at home, while he said:

"I seek service of you, Soto, and I shall expect to pay for it, as I would in any other purchase I might make."

"I live to make gold, señor, and, outside of old friendships, yours is as good as the average, so tell me your desire, and I will tell you its value."

"You are the same cool villain that you ever were, Soto," sneered the young man.

"Yes, señor, time has changed me precious little from what I was six years ago upon the Rio Grande; but it has changed you greatly, señor, and you have become a handsome gentleman, strangely like your mother; but how did you know that I was in New Orleans?"

"I heard that you left the Rio Grande to save your neck, and had opened a wine shop here, so I sought you out, as I needed work done."

"You know I will serve you well, señor?"

"I shall expect you to do so; but though I could force you to act through fear of being betrayed for what you are, I will pay you liberally."

"Señor, don't threaten, for I, too, could tell dark secrets that might check your gallant career; but let us not quarrel, for I really wish to be of service to you, and you have but to command me."

"Well, let us to business, Soto, and I am ready to pay well."

"First, you know the South and North are going to war?"

"Have gone to war, señor, for the first guns have been fired," corrected Soto.

"Well, the struggle will be a long and bitter one from the start, and before I cast my sword upon either side I wish to look a little to the future."

"There is one, if I could get rid of, I would go upon the Northern side; but if I cannot, I will take up the cause of the South."

"Now, that man lives in Mississippi; but he is now in this city, and upon his return to his home will raise a company of cavalry for the Confederate army, and he is one to rise to distinction rapidly."

"This must not be, for you must kill him."

"A life is not hard to take, señor; but then an assassin is worthy of his wages."

"You shall have gold, as I said."

"Who is he?"

The young man whispered a name into the ear of the Mexican, and the latter started, while he said:

"I know him, señor; but why do you not pick a quarrel with him, have him challenge you, and kill him in a *duel*?"

"I tried that once, Soto, and it might terminate against me."

"You are a superb swordsman, señor?"

"He is a better one."

"You are a crack shot, señor."

"He is a dead shot."

"Ah! I see I must take the affair in hand, señor."

"You must."

"I'll do so; but when do you wish the work done?"

"To-night, for delays are dangerous."

"And my money, señor?"

"I will give you one thousand dollars for the job; five hundred now, and as much more when it is ended."

"I'll do it for two thousand, señor, half cash in advance, balance on completion of the work."

"I will not pay it."

"Look elsewhere then, señor, for an assassin," and the man arose to go.

"Hold! I will pay you your price, large as it is."

"It is cheap, señor, for I knock off liberally for the sake of our old friendship when I was guide to—"

"Sh! You need not refer to the past, Soto, for I have dropped that out of my life."

"Here, take this money, and to-morrow bring me news that you have done your work well."

"I make no mistakes, señor," and pocketing his blood-money, Soto arose, dashed off another glass of wine, lighted a fresh cigar, and departed from the room with a simple:

"Adios, señor."

Straight to the Hotel St. Charles he bent his steps, and glancing over the Register, saw the name that he was in search of.

Asking for the gentleman he was told that he had just gone to the levee to take the steamer up to his home.

Hastily leaving the hotel, Soto sprung into a cab and gave an order to the driver.

Rapidly the vehicle sped along until it came to a halt before a low wine-shop in the French quarter of the city.

Springing out of the cab Soto darted into the shop, and after an absence of a few moments returned, wearing a suit of traveling-clothes and having a sachet swung over one shoulder by a strap.

"Drive down to the steamer Natchez, and, as she leaves at five, you have just ten minutes to make it," said Soto, tossing the cabman a liberal fee that sent him flying along at a pace most dangerous to foot-passengers.

Springing upon the gang-plank as the deckhands were hauling it in with a merry chorus in two-score of voices, Soto ascended to the cabin, and his eyes glanced hastily over the group of passengers.

Through the crowd he made his way, until suddenly his eyes lighted up, as they rested upon a tall form standing by the guard and glancing with interest over the city front as the steamer sped swiftly along on her way up the river.

"There is my man," he muttered, in a tone of cruel triumph.

And the assassin immediately went to the office and engaged a state room for the trip, feeling perfectly assured that his victim was in his power, and he could content himself until time to act.

When darkness fell upon river and shore and the steamer went swiftly on its way, the Mexican assassin sought an opportunity to carry out his plot to kill the one whose track he was dogging.

But there came no chance to execute his red work, and the intended victim retired with no thought that he had one on his track that sought his life.

During the day the steamer ran in to the shore at a landing near an elegant plantation home, and the one whose steps were dogged went ashore, and was warmly greeted as he landed by several negroes who had come down to meet him upon seeing the Natchez head inshore to make a stop.

The assassin stood quietly upon the hurricane-deck, coolly watching his intended victim go ashore, and then, as the Natchez held on her way up the river, he asked:

"How far to your next landing, sir?"

"Ten miles," responded Captain Leathers, of the Natchez, to whom the question had been addressed.

"I will go ashore there, if you please."

"It is only a plantation landing."

"Yes, sir; but I find I have left some important papers back in the city, which I should have brought with me, and I'll get off and catch the next steamer down the river."

"She will pass our next landing about midnight."

"That will do; thank you, sir," answered Soto, and half an hour after he went ashore at a plantation landing.

A negro man was the only one there to meet the boat and receive the mail and freight, and Soto asked:

"Will you point out the Rest Haven Plantation to me, my man?"

"Lor', massa, it am twelve mile below here, sah, down de ribber."

"Indeed! how provoking that the captain did not tell me."

"But can I get a boat to take me down there?"

"De Charmer come down about midnight, massa."

"I cannot wait for her, so will take a skiff."

"If you go up to de plantation, sah, my massa send you down in de carriage, sah."

"No; I prefer to take that little skiff moored to the bank."

"Dat boat am my fishin'-skiff, sah, and I can't spare him."

"Here, my man, is a twenty-dollar gold-piece for you, and I will take your skiff and send it back to you to-night."

"Lor', massa, you is a good man; but take de skiff, sah, and I'll tell 'em at de plantation dat de wabes of de Natchez wash her adrift, sah."

"All right, my man; and do not speak of any one having landed here, as it might get you into trouble about the skiff."

"Yas, sah."

And the negro busied himself about the pile of freight, while Soto went down to the water's edge, sprung into the skiff, and as he pulled swiftly down the stream, muttered:

"Now, Planter Darrington, this night you are doomed to die."

CHAPTER IX.

SUSPECTED.

ANCHOR, the colored man who so nobly aided Dean Darrington in the rescue of the passengers from the burning steamer, was the most trusted of all the Rest Haven Plantation slaves.

He was a giant in strength, quick as a cat in his movements, brave unto utter recklessness, and idolized his young master.

It had been a great grief to him to be separated for years from his boy master, when Dean Darrington went North to enter West Point, and he was very glad when circumstances brought him back to the old plantation.

Although there was a negro overseer on the place who had charge of the slaves in the field and quarter, Anchor was left with a general supervision over all at the time when his master went to New York to learn his fate from the lips of Lois Delafield.

Upon his return, Anchor met him at the landing, and the quick-witted negro saw at once that all had not gone right with his young master, for his handsome face was clouded.

"Hope Missy Lois am going to be our mistress, sah?" he said inquiringly, as they walked toward the mansion from the landing.

Anchor was partially in his master's confidence, and he knew what had been the motive of his trip North.

"Ah, Anchor, I fear not, for though Miss Delafield promised to be my wife, war has just broken out between the North and the South, and heaven only knows what may happen."

"That's too bad, sah; but folks say you is going to the war."

"Yes, I shall at once raise a company and go to the front, and Colonel Delafield is already in the field upon the other side; so you see, Anchor, the chances of Miss Lois being my wife are very small," and Dean Darrington entered the house, where the other servants gathered around him in a warm welcome, for he was a kindly master, and beloved by all upon his plantation.

"Here is your letters and papers, massa," and Anchor placed upon the table a basket full of mail, which had arrived during the absence of the young planter.

Letter after letter was opened and read, and the brow of Dean Darrington contracted as he noted the contents, for nearly all breathed of war, and many questions as to his intended course were asked, while it was urged by some that he should at once raise a regiment, as he had received a military education.

"No, no, not a regiment, though I feel that I could raise one, in the present feeling of our people for war; but I will begin lower down, and raise a company at once and take the field."

"I will now ride over to consult some of my planter friends, for what I do I shall do at once; but, oh! that this bitter cup could pass from my lips, and duty did not compel me to take up arms against the one that I love so dearly."

Calling for his horse, Dean Darrington rode away at a rapid canter, while Anchor stood gazing after him, and saying:

"Massa hain't feelin' happy about this war; but he are going to be a soldier, and he says he'll take me along, so I'm all right; but there's going to be lots o' people get hurted afore it's done with."

"Now, who is that?" and Anchor's eyes turned upon the form of a man who was approaching from the river.

Walking toward the stranger, he met him at the steps of the mansion, and was not prepossessed with his appearance.

"Well, my man, is this the Rest Haven Plantation?" he asked.

"Yes, sah."

"Mr. Dean Darrington at home?"

"No, sah; he have just rid away."

"That is unfortunate; but when will he return?"

"He hardly be back afore night, sah."

"I am sorry, for I came especially to see him upon a matter of business."

Anchor had seen the man before him, standing upon the deck of the Natchez, at the time his master landed, and knew that he had continued on up the river on the steamer, for he had marked his dark face at the time.

Now he saw him come to Rest Haven and ask for his master, with whom he had been a fellow passenger, so he said:

"How did you come, sah?"

"The steamer took me on by, as I did not know the river, and they neglected to tell me when we reached Rest Haven Landing," and Soto saw that he was under suspicion, for he, too, had seen Anchor upon the bank, and thought that he might have also discerned him.

"That was too bad, sah; but massa come up on the Natchez with you."

"Indeed! How strange! But then I am not acquainted with your master, and so missed him; but I have come, as I said, upon important business, so will lounge about the place until he returns."

Had it been any differently-appearing visitor, Anchor would have invited him into the mansion, had the butler set out refreshments for him, and made him feel at home; but being suspicious of the man, he offered him a seat upon

the piazza, brought him a cold glass of water, and some books to look over, and then departed.

The Mexican drank the water, threw himself into an easy-chair, glanced at the books, and seeing no one around entered the mansion.

He remained within some fifteen minutes, and there being no servants about, he glided from room to room with the celerity and noiselessness of a professional burglar.

Here and there he found little things that took his fancy, and they were quickly transferred to his pockets or the sachel, and then he again resumed his seat upon the veranda.

Thus an hour passed, and as the sun neared the western horizon, he arose and stealthily walked out into the ornamental grounds.

A handsome clump of ornamental trees stood just to the left of the massive gateway, leading from the river highway into the grounds, and through this Soto knew that Dean Darrington must pass on his return.

He had discovered that he had gone out on horseback, and Anchor had said that his master would doubtless be home to supper, so this was the spot for an ambush.

It would bring the young planter to within ten feet of him, and when he stopped to open the gate he would fire upon him.

The boat in which he had come from the landing above lay a mile up the river, and after firing his fatal shot he would have time to reach it and thus escape.

If the shot was heard at the mansion, it would not doubtless attract much attention, and he could pull through the night to the landing above, take the downward bound steamer, and thus make good his escape.

The plan looked easy of accomplishment in the mind of Soto, and so he selected his position, took out from his sachel a large silver-mounted revolver, carefully loaded it, and then calmly sat down to await the coming of his victim with the patience of an Indian.

But all the while there had been a pair of eyes upon him that he little dreamed of.

They had seen him enter the mansion, and through the open windows had beheld him ransacking the rooms; they had seen him come out of the mansion, resume his seat, and afterward steal away, apparently search the grounds for some hiding-place, and then glide into the little bunch of ornamental trees.

Hardly had he done so when out from a little arbor came the form of Anchor, and with the light tread of an Indian he approached the hiding-place of the Mexican.

Acquainted with every foot of ground, Anchor gained a point of observation where he could peep through the foliage upon Soto.

He beheld the Mexican seated upon the ground and carefully loading a pistol, while there was every indication that he meant mischief, and against whom it was it was not hard for the negro to guess.

His first impulse was to dart in upon the Mexican; but he felt that the chances would be wholly against him in attacking an armed man.

So he determined to use strategy, and stealing noiselessly away from his point of observation, he turned into the main walk leading to the gate and walked boldly along it, as though searching for somebody.

Whistling as he came, he was heard by the Mexican, who quickly hid his weapons and then strolled leisurely out from his place of concealment.

"Well, my man, I have been enjoying a look at your master's beautiful grounds," he said.

"Yas, massa, dey is very han'some, sah," quietly answered Anchor, while he added:

"I was looking for you, sah, to ask you to come to supper."

"Has your master returned?" quickly asked Soto.

"No, sah; but I thought you might want something to eat, sah, for it's gittin' night."

"No, thank you," answered Soto, who feared that Dean Darrington might arrive at any moment, and was consequently anxious to get rid of the negro.

"You go and get your supper, my man, and I'll walk about the levee here, looking at the river, until your master comes."

Anchor was more than ever convinced that the Mexican meant mischief, so he suddenly seized him in his powerful arms, and in spite of his struggles, soon had him securely bound, with the leather strap which he had torn from the sachel for that purpose.

Soto was taken wholly by surprise and fought desperately; but, though a strong man, he was a mere child in the powerful clutch of the negro.

"What does this mean?" he gasped, livid with rage.

"It mean, sah, dat you have rob my massa, and I do believes was waitin' here to kill him; but you come with me, and wait for massa to come, and if I have done wrong then I am very sorry."

Leaving his prisoner bound, Anchor sought the clump of trees, and soon found the revolver hidden there among the branches of the shrubbery, and having secured this, he led the Mexican to the rear of the mansion, where was a small brick building used as a storehouse.

Into this he thrust his prisoner, having taken from him his satchel, and what he had stolen, and approaching the mansion, he was met by his master, who just then rode up.

"Well, Anchor, it is settled, and we go to the war within three days, for I have been offered the captaincy of the company known as the Black Horse Rangers, and raised by the planters during my absence North."

"Yes, sah; but, massa, I has done something you may scold me for, but I hopes not," and Anchor told of the coming of Soto, his thieving acts, and how he had lurked in the shrubbery, with the evident intent of shooting the young planter upon his return.

"Anchor, you have done just right, and we will have a look at this fellow."

"Get a lantern and come with me to the storehouse," and with his faithful horse still following him, Dean Darrington approached the brick building which was serving as Soto's prison, while Anchor went to the mansion after a lantern.

Placing the key which Anchor had given him into the lock, he was about to open the door, when it was thrown back with a force that felled him to the earth, and partially stunned him. He did not rise instantly to his feet, and when he did so, believed that the prisoner had sprung upon the back of his horse and was dashing at full speed toward the river highway.

"Ho, Dan! Reuben! Anchor! unbar the door of the hound kennel and put the dogs on track of yonder fugitive."

"Reuben, bring me a horse with all speed, and another for Anchor!"

So cried Dean Darrington, and his voice aroused the negro servants in the outhouses near the mansion, and they hastened to obey, just as Anchor came up with a lantern.

"He is gone, Anchor, and upon Bay Bess; but we will give chase."

"Set the dogs on the trail, and we will follow," and two minutes after the young planter and the negro were mounted and following the hounds, which in full cry were in chase of Bay Bess with the daring Mexican mounted upon her back.

CHAPTER X.

FOILED.

THE Mexican assassin, in his flight, took the gravelled road to the gate leading into the grounds from the highway, for he remembered well the surroundings of the mansion.

The gate, however, was closed, and not understanding a new kind of latch upon it, he was compelled to dismount from his saddle and open it, after which, in leading the horse through and remounting, some little time was taken up.

As he darted off the pack of hounds came in full cry in chase, and they, too, were delayed in getting over the fence.

But soon all had scrambled over, and went flying up the levee highway, some hundred yards behind Bay Bess.

Fortunately the animal which Dean Darrington had ridden that afternoon was not one of the fleetest in his stables, and the hounds gained upon her rapidly.

Knowing also the lack of speed in Bay Bess, the young planter had sprung up on the back of Black Lightning, the fleetest animal in the State and a thoroughbred.

Hearing the gate clang to when shut by Soto, the planter had headed directly for the fence, which was of narrow boards, topped, and some five feet in height.

Across the level lawn sped Black Lightning, and straight at the fence he was sent by his daring rider, while Anchor, who had sprung upon the back of a roan mare, without a saddle, followed not far behind.

"Come, Lightning!" cried Dean Darrington, and the splendid beast rose into the air as though shot from a gun, cleared the fence with plenty of space to spare, and landed safely in the road.

"You got to do ther same, Tiptoe," cried Anchor, and the roan was driven furiously at the fence, rose into the air and cleared it without touching a hoof.

"I knowed yer'd do it, honey," the negro said, with enthusiasm, while the planter called back:

"You did well, Anchor, and we gained fifty yards by our leaps over the fence—but great God!"

"Well, massa! what de matter?"

"Anchor, the hounds were not taken into the brick storehouse, and put upon the scent of the fugitive, but took the trail of Bay Bess and will pull her down unless we reach them," called back Dean Darrington.

"Oh Lorly!" answered Anchor, in a tone of horror, and the master and his slave urged their horses to the very utmost, and rapidly gained upon the fugitive and the hounds.

But the latter were already upon the heels of Bay Bess, and knowing that he would be overtaken and torn to pieces, the fugitive suddenly rode upon the levee, and drawing rein beneath the spreading branch of a tree, sprung upon it, at the same time giving the mare a kick, which sent her flying on up the path.

The next instant the hounds passed beneath the tree, and a moment after Dean Darrington sped by, with Anchor close upon his heels.

Then there broke forth on the night air a wild shriek, almost human, followed by the yelping, snarling and snapping of the hounds.

"They have caught the beast and are killing it; but I am safe," gloated Soto, and he went further up the tree and hid himself in the foliage.

There came to him the stern cries of the planter, the harsh shouts of the negro, mingling with the shrieks of poor Bay Bess and the worrying of the dogs, and they told the story that the unfortunate mare had met an awful fate.

Smiling grimly, Soto sat on his perch and waited.

The sounds ceased soon up the river, and then he heard the approach of the planter, the negro and the hounds, who were now cowed after their work of killing the mare.

"He has escaped us, Anchor," said Dean Darrington, as he rode under the tree where the fugitive sat.

"Yas, massa, he have, and I is sorry for it."

"I wish I could have seen him, and known his motive in seeking my life."

"You say he was a foreigner?"

"He was a small man, sah, with awful black complexion and bright eyes, and he talk with accent; but maybe you will know when you look at things I done tuk from him."

"Ah, yes; you have them?"

"Yes, sah; and the things he tuck from the house; but I didn't take his money, sah, and he had plenty of it."

And the planter and Anchor, who had halted beneath the tree, rode on.

Waiting until they were out of sight, Soto descended from his perch, walked rapidly along on the top of the levee for a short distance, when he came to the body of the poor mare.

"You saved my life, good horse," he said, with a glance at the dead animal.

And continuing on up the river for a quarter of a mile he reached a tree whose branches extended over into the stream.

Here he had left his boat.

It was still there, and springing into it, he pulled with rapid stroke up the river.

After a hard row of more than two hours the Mexican reached the landing where he had procured the boat.

The negro was there, standing in front of his little cabin and watching a light in the distance, which he said was the steamer coming down.

Half an hour after Soto was safely on board the steamer, and from his state-room looked out upon Rest Haven Plantation as they sped by.

The next evening he entered the room of the one who had hired him to carry out his red work.

"Ha! you back?" cried the occupant, springing to his feet.

"I am, señor."

"And you have taken his life?"

"No; I nearly lost mine."

"Coward!"

"No, señor, I am no coward, as you should know, and as you shall hear."

And Soto told the man who had engaged him all that had occurred, adding:

"I have a look not easily disguised, señor, and in these times of war troubles it would not have been well for daylight to have found me there, so I postponed my work until a more convenient season."

"No; I will look after the affair myself, for there is but one thing for me to do now."

"And what is that, señor?"

"Go into the Confederate army."

"Will you do so, señor?"

"Yes; so give me back my money, excepting what you have used for your expenses and enough to pay for your time."

"I told you, señor, that the negro took all that I had with me, and I carried the sum you gave me."

"How did you get back without money?" suspiciously asked the young man.

"I gave the mate of the steamer a ring I wore and promised to redeem it," was the ready reply of the Mexican.

"Well, I will have to put up with the loss of my money; but if you wish to join the Confederate army and dog the steps of Dean Darrington until you kill him, when you come to me with proof of his death, by your hand, I will pay you five thousand dollars, and I shall remain out of the service until I hear from you."

"What do you say?"

"I will find out just what command the señor will go with, and I shall at once enlist, señor, for your offer is a liberal one," was the response of the assassin, and soon after he departed from the hotel, well supplied with funds to carry out his fell purpose, while the man he left behind him muttered grimly:

"Now, Dean Darrington, I have put a blood-hound upon your trail that will hunt you to the death, and with you out of the way, my gallant rival, Lois Delafield shall become Mrs. Antonio Dallas, for I play to win both love and gold now," and the face of the man proved that he meant every word he uttered.

CHAPTER XI.

TRACKING A FOE.

THE tocsin of war has rung throughout the land, and from North to South, East to West, the uniforms of citizen soldiery are seen.

The first guns have been fired, the first battles between the Blue and the Gray followed, and as ardently as did the former rush to arms to fight for the "stars and stripes," just so determined were the men of the Southern land in battling for the "stars and bars" that floated over the new-born Confederacy.

In Virginia, armies of the North and South were facing each other, moving as cautiously as an experienced player makes his moves upon the chess-board, but, ah! with a vastly different result, for honor and victory, or death and defeat must follow each move where brother faced brother in an armed encounter.

In Tennessee and Kentucky also were armies gathered, each under skillful generals, and each awaiting to strike a death-blow to the other.

The fair land of the South was the scene of war, the march of armies echoed from the hillsides, the plow was deserted in the fields, the herds were without a herder, the homes were left to the women and children, for the father and his boys had gone to fight for the "Bonnie Blue Flag."

In a beautiful valley of Tennessee, through which winds a romantic river, a small army was encamped.

The gray uniforms of the soldiers, as well as the flag floating over the head-quarters' tent, proved that it was a Confederate encampment.

The scene was a picturesque one, with a pack of light artillery stationed upon a lawn-like pasture that sloped to the river, a regiment of infantry upon either side, and upon the outskirts camps of cavalry.

One of the latter occupied a position upon the right and was some four-score strong.

Half a dozen army wagons and three ambulances comprised its carrying outfit, and a glance upon the encampment would show that the troopers were ready to march or fight at a moment's notice.

There was one peculiarity of the little command as regarded the men, and another where the horses were concerned.

The men appeared to be, all of them, above the average soldier and in their uniform of privates looked the officer and gentleman.

Their faces were bold, fearless, full of intelligence and refinement, and they were certainly enlisted from the highest walks in life.

Their horses, without exception, were jet-black, even the large mules that drew the wagons and ambulances being of the same sable hue.

Though numbering but four-score men, each soldier seemed to possess several horses, while in the camp were visible about thirty negroes, wearing the cast-off uniforms of their young masters, for young they were, hardly any of them appearing to have reached thirty years of age.

The camp equipage, the military equipments, and all their weapons were of the best and in perfect order.

A cooking tent, four mess, one head-quarters and twelve sleeping tents made up the camp, which was situated a little apart from the rest of the army encampment.

In a hammock, swung between two trees that overshadowed the head-quarter tent, a young man was reclining, and idly smoking a cigar, while a book lay open upon his breast.

A glance at the one thus lying at ease, and the handsome face of Dean Darrington is recognized, and the three bars upon his gray coat-collar and the lace upon his sleeves indicate his rank as captain.

It is some months since his departure from his elegant plantation home for the peril and hardship of army life, and in that time, as captain of the Black-Horse Rangers, he has won fame and rendered his distinguished services to the cause for which he fought.

His ranks had been thinned out, the tins and the elegance had worn off under the hard service, the young planter soldiers had given up their lives of luxury and idleness, and in return had won admiration and honor, and had become veterans that made them known as the crack cavalry command of the army.

Suddenly a tall form advances rapidly toward the hammock.

It is Anchor, the faithful negro comrade, though slave, of the young planter, and his face wears a look of excitement.

He is dressed in a demi-military suit, wears top-boots with spurs, and a slouch hat encircled by a gold cord, a make-up that makes him the admiration of all the dusky damsels he meets in his wanderings, while his fine face, herculean form, and elegant manners, copied from his master, win their hearts.

"Massa, is you asleep?" he asks, softly.

"No, Anchor, what is it?" and Dean Darrington turned his face toward the negro.

"Massa, there has just left the general's quarters a man who, some of the soldiers I heerd say, was plottin' a little scheme for us to capture the Yankee general and his staff; but I know the man, sah, and he is the same one we

had a prisoner at the plantation, and who escaped and left poor Bay Bess to the hounds."

"Where is the man, Anchor?" and Captain Darrington sprung from the hammock.

"He just left head-quarters, sah."

"You are sure it is the man you took prisoner at the plantation?"

"Yes, sah."

"I will go to the general, and see just what he came for," and ten minutes after Captain Darrington approached the quarters of the general.

"Ah! Darrington, glad to see you, for I was just going to send for you," said General Morgan, pleasantly.

"Well, general, I am at your service."

"I know that, captain, and I was going to ask you to go and meet a Union officer, who it seems is going to turn traitor, and betray into my hands an important command."

"He has sent a man to me to state his plans; says he is a Southerner who went into the Northern army, and now, regretting his course, is determined to come to us, doing what he can to make up for having fought against us."

"I hate a turn-coat, and do not care to have him on our side; but if he can do what he promises, I will be glad to avail myself of his services."

"He sent a messenger, you say, general?"

"Yes; an evil-faced fellow, too; but a Confederate soldier who is in his confidence, and will come with him."

"He did not give the Union officer's name, but says he was once your friend, and desires to have you meet him at a certain point to talk over the affair with him, so I was going to go and see what there is in it."

"I will go with pleasure, sir."

"He appoints the meeting for this evening at sunset, and will meet you upon the river-bank, at the old log fort that you know of."

"Yes, sir, I will be there, and I will start at once, for I have a desire to see this messenger," and half an hour after, Dean Darrington, mounted upon his favorite horse, Black Lightning, and accompanied by Anchor, riding a large horse, as black as was the animal his master bestrode.

Taking the trail of the messenger they followed it to the river, and saw, far down the stream, a small raft, upon which was a horse and a man, the latter poling across to the other shore.

"Take my glass, Anchor, and see if that is our man."

"Yes, massa, dat am him," answered Anchor, after a quick glance through the glass.

"We must have that raft, for see, he has landed, mounted and ridden away, leaving it hidden under the branches of that tree."

"I get him, sah," and quickly Anchor threw off his clothing and plunged into the river.

He landed some distance above the raft, and knowing that the current would bear him still further down, Dean Darrington led the horses along the bank to a point half a mile below.

As he halted Anchor landed from the raft, and quickly dressed himself.

"Leave your horse here, Anchor, and you can wait upon the other side for me," said Captain Darrington, leading his horse upon the raft.

Having landed, the young captain rode up the river-bank, leaving Anchor to await his return by the raft.

Taking the trail of the man he followed, he plunged boldly into the forest, and a ride of a couple of miles brought him to a ridge, over which he cautiously peered.

As he did so an exclamation broke from his lips, while he muttered:

"The camp of Gayoso the Guerrilla, as I live!"

"Ah! that man standing by his horse is the one I have tracked, and he is talking excitedly—Ha!"

Quick as a flash Dean Darrington turned, for suddenly a man came out from behind a rock near by, and he held a revolver pointed toward him and covering his heart.

The man was a wild-looking fellow, dressed half in blue, half in gray uniform, and Captain Darrington knew that he must belong to the guerrilla band, a set of desperadoes who served either the North or South, as circumstances demanded in serving their own interests, which were to prey upon all who fell into their power.

"Ah, sir, I am glad to see you, for I would ask if that is the camp of Captain Gayoso?" coolly said Dean Darrington.

"It is Gayoso's camp, and I know you as the captain of the Black-Horse Rangers," was the reply.

"Yes, I am Captain Darrington, of the Black-Horse Rangers, and a messenger from your camp came to the army several hours ago, and I wish to see him."

"It was Captain Gayoso himself, and he went after you, for the blue-coats want you, and you've run right into the trap, so hands up, for you are my prisoner!" and the man leveled his revolver at the head of the young officer.

"I can but surrender, sir, so lead me to your captain, who will quickly release me, as I come on important service," was the cool reply, to throw his captor off his guard.

The ruse was successful, for the guerrilla lowered his weapon, and, quick as a flash, Dean

Darrington had drawn his revolver and thrown it forward.

With a cry of alarm the guerrilla threw out his arm once more, and the two weapons flashed almost together, but the trigger of one was pulled with a death-grip, for the Confederate officer had sent his bullet through the heart of his foe.

The shots alarmed the guerrilla camp, and there was mounting in hot haste, and riding toward the scene.

But, with a bound, Dean Darrington was in his saddle, and off he went at a run, while holding him, as they gained the top of the ridge, and seeing the work he had done, the guerrilla band went in pursuit with shots and yells.

Black Lightning ran easily along, but there were some fast horses upon his track, and half a dozen rapidly dropped the two-score in chase and began to gain.

"Come, Lightning, show them that you are playing with them," said Captain Darrington, and instantly the splendid horse began to widen the gap between himself and his pursuers, and reached the river-bank several hundred feet in advance.

Anchor was on the alert, and as his master rode upon the raft and faced his pursuers, a revolver in each hand, he shoved off from the shore, just as the guerrillas opened fire upon dashing down toward the water's edge, the one in advance crying:

"A thousand dollars for yonder Confederate officer, dead or alive!"

"Massa, dat am de man, sah!"

"I know him if he do wear a mask!" cried Anchor, referring to the horseman who was in advance of the others, and whom Dean Darrington now covered with his revolver.

CHAPTER XII.

A CHANGE OF MASTERS.

In a wild mountain gorge, in the State of Tennessee, a man lay upon a rude bed in a humble log cabin.

His face, though pinched with suffering, and wan, was readily recognizable as that of Soto, the Mexican.

A negro was cooking a steak upon the coals, upon the hearth of the large fireplace, and the door being open showed the day to be stormy and dismal.

The man tossed uneasily upon his bed, muttering imprecations from time to time, and often turning his gaze to the open door, as though he expected some one.

"He should have been here last night, Dan, and here it is noon, and he has not come yet," he said, feverishly.

"Yas, massa; but he come long soon," was the hopeful answer of the negro, and one which he had repeated half a hundred times.

"Ah! there they come now!" cried Soto, as he beheld, through the open door, two horsemen coming up the gorge.

"Yas, massa, dat am dem," said the negro, as he glanced out at the horsemen, who were approaching the cabin at a gallop.

A few minutes after two men entered the cabin.

One was in a uniform, but whether Union or Confederate no one could tell, so evenly was it divided between blue and gray.

From his shoulders he threw aside a blanket, his head having been thrust through a hole in the center, and he was seen to be thoroughly armed.

His companion was a tall, well-formed man in civilian's attire, and though he wore a full beard it did not disguise beyond recognition Antonio Dallas.

"Well, Soto, you are in hard luck, it seems; but are you going to make a die of it?" said Dallas, throwing aside his dripping cloak and hat, and approaching the bed.

"Not if I can help it; but I was pretty badly wounded, Senor Dallas, in the shoulder and in the leg, while my horse was shot and fell upon me, giving me additional injuries that will lay me up for months."

"Well, I hope you have a good report to render, for I was told you were hurt in chasing Dean Darrington."

"He escaped, and left me a wreck; for he shot me twice and killed my horse."

"Soto, you are no good," angrily said Antonio Dallas.

"In taking that man's life, I confess it, and I intend to throw up the job, for the Fates are against me, and I don't strike against Fate."

"I did my duty, senor, for knowing that Captain Darrington did not know me, I enlisted in the same brigade, to find out that he had his body-servant, the negro, who knew me but too well."

"So I deserted, fearing to be recognized, and joined a guerrilla band, and have worked for both sides as suited me, for I got to be captain of the gang."

"And this Captain Gayoso we hear so much about?"

"I am Captain Gayoso."

"You?"

"Yes, senor."

"The deuce you are!"

"Yes, senor."

"Why, you have made yourself famous, Soto, and neither Union or Confederate officers know to which side you really belong."

"I belong to neither side, and both sides, as suits my convenience, and I have made money out of my double work; but I am not going to lose my life, when I can go back to my wine-shop in New Orleans and live quietly."

"You always was a coward, Soto; but about Dean Darrington?"

"I have several times had him in my power, but always something prevented my killing him, and two weeks ago I laid a plot which I was sure would lead him into a trap, for I told his general a story about a Union officer wishing to betray his command, and being an old friend of Captain Darrington, wished him to come to a certain point to meet him and arrange matters."

"How it happened I do not know, but Darrington tracked me to my camp, for I was doubtless seen by the negro and recognized, killed one of my best men, and though I pursued him to the river, he escaped, after wounding me and killing another of my band."

"My men brought me here and dispersed, for fear of an attack; but they are to meet here tonight, and I shall give up my position as captain, have them carry me to the town where I can get good surgical attendance and some comforts, and give up this life of wild warfare, for I am tired of it."

"And do you expect me to pay you for what you have failed in doing?"

"I do, for you have been lucky in gambling in the towns, and I know have been acting as a spy for the Union army, so you can either pay me or suffer the penalty of a spy."

"Ah! that is your game, is it?" and Antonio Dallas made a move, as though to grasp the wounded man and strangle him, when quickly came the words from behind him:

"Hold on dere, boy! I scalds yer wid dis b'ilin' gravy!"

Dallas turned quickly to find the negro confronting him, a frying-pan of seething grease in his hand, and his attitude that of one who meant just what he said.

"Put down your dangerous weapon, my man, for I have no idea of harming your master," he said quietly, and turning to the guerrilla leader he continued:

"Soto, I have a proposition to make you."

"Well, senor?"

"The life I am leading is even more hazardous than yours, so I might as well be in the field."

"Had you killed Darrington, as you hired to do, I would have gone North, opnly entered the Federal service, and accomplished a certain purpose I have in view; but, as you have failed to do so, I shall have to take the matter in my own hands."

"I do not care to openly enter the Confederate service, so I will pay you the price agreed upon between us for the life of Darrington, for your position as captain of your guerrilla band."

"What say you?"

"I am willing to sell out, senor; but I have a lieutenant that is anxious to step into my shoes."

"I will buy him off too."

"He won't sell."

"You sell me your place as chief, and I'll deal with him as I deem best."

"I'll do it, senor, so pay me the money, and as soon as the rain holds up I'll get the men to carry me over the mountains to where I can procure a vehicle to take me into the city."

"Agreed! here is a check upon a bank in the city, and it is certified, so I will make it payable to your order, and, as it calls for four thousand dollars, I'll give you the balance in cash."

"Now tell me who your lieutenant is?"

"His name is Monk, and he will be here tonight, as he is coming for orders; but now sit down and have some supper, for Dan is no slouch of a cook I can tell you."

"I buy Dan with your band, I suppose, Soto," said Antonio Dallas, throwing himself into a rustic chair.

"If you wish the negro you will have to pay for him."

"Is he your property?"

"As much as is anything else that I claim," was the grim response.

"Well said, Soto, for all you have you got by foul means, as witness my having to pay you for what you did not accomplish; but how much for the negro?"

"Call it five hundred."

"I'll call it two hundred to you and fifty for himself."

"Take him."

"Here's your money, and this sum is for you, Dan, and you are my property."

"Yas, massa, thankee."

"And I hope you'll prove as willing to protect me as you were your old master awhile since against me."

"I perfeks my owner, massa, if he's good to me; but de men is comin', sah," and Dan pointed down the gorge, where were visible a number of men who had just ridden into view.

"Is Lieutenant Monk with them, Dan?" asked Soto.

"No, sah."

The men rode up to the cabin, dismounted, hitched their horses, and entered.

They were a wild-looking set of men, dressed in semi-military costume, wearing large-brimmed slouch hats, cavalry boots, and all with revolvers, a saber and a rifle each.

A blanket, with a hole in the middle, was over the shoulders of each man, and falling to their boot-tops, protected them from the rain and kept their weapons dry.

They glanced at Dallas, nodded to Soto, and one of them asked him how he was getting along.

"I'm in a bad way, men, and I have sold out my position to this person, who will make you a good captain."

"He paid me a couple of thousand for the place, so I'll give you half to divide among you."

The men looked surprised, while one said, gruffly:

"Well, Cap, it's better that you sold yourself than us."

This remark seemed to meet with universal approval, and another asked:

"Put how about Lieutenant Monk, cap'n?"

"Your new captain and Monk can settle that between them."

"He won't give in, you bet."

"He must and shall!"

It was the first time that Antonio Dallas had spoken, and his deep, stern voice brought every eye upon him, as well as the very decided words he uttered.

"A little dandyish—but looks as though he had grit," said one.

"There's going to be a Kilkenny cat time when Lieutenant Monk comes," announced another, and other comments would have been made had not Dallas again spoken:

"Men, I have been in the spy service, but it matters not on which side, and I believe I can put you in a fair way to make money, and that is what you wish, or I am mistaken."

"You know us, captain," said one, with a light laugh, and a general burst of laughter followed.

"My plan is to make you a band of guerrilla spies, turning all information to our own profit, and if there is one among you who objects to me as his commander let him now speak."

A deathlike silence followed the words of Antonio Dallas for full a minute, and he stood watching them earnestly, his piercing eyes resting in turn upon every face.

Then one near the door said:

"We are all agreeable to you, captain; but here comes one who will object."

"Who is he?" quietly asked Dallas, glancing out of the door.

"Lieutenant Monk," was the reply, and as the man uttered the name a horseman dashed up to the door of the cabin, dismounted and entered.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DOUBLE GAME.

"You are Lieutenant Monk, I believe?" and Antonio Dallas stepped forward and confronted the stranger who entered, his cool bearing winning for him the admiration of the score of men gathered in the cabin.

"Yes, and you?" was the blunt retort of Lieutenant Monk, who was a heavy-set, tall man of forty, with the face of one who rather gloried in being a lawless character.

"My name is Captain Gayoso," returned Dallas, with cool effrontery.

"Ah! a brother of our captain? I am glad to see you."

"No, I am your captain."

Lieutenant Monk looked at the speaker in a queer sort of way, and then glanced at his men, and next at his wounded ex-captain.

Then he said:

"Stranger, I'm no man to joke with."

"Nor am I one to joke upon a serious subject, so I will explain that I am to be captain of this band now, and I will be glad to have you remain my lieutenant, if you will."

"By Heaven! but there is no regular army business in this guerrilla band, to send an outside officer here to put him over us, and I, for one, will not stand it, whatever the captain may do," said Monk.

"I have sold out, Monk, to that gentleman," quietly remarked Soto, who was known among his men by his Christian name of Gayoso.

"You may sell out, but I won't, and I am captain here."

"You wish to be captain then?" asked Dallas, with the coolest effrontery possible.

"I not only wish to be, but I intend to be," was the quick retort.

"You desire the position enough to fight for it?"

"By Heaven I do!"

"Better be content to live as lieutenant than lose your life trying to be captain."

"Who will kill me?" and Monk's burning eyes were turned upon Dallas, who did not flinch, and answered in the same cool manner:

"Lieutenant Monk, it suits me to lead a wild, lawless life, for certain purposes of my own, and

I have taken command of this band, as a means to an end I have in view, and if you desire to contest it with me, I will borrow the sword of your ex-captain, and as you wear a blade, we will see who is the better man."

"Now you talk as I would have you, and may the best man win," shouted Lieutenant Monk.

"Or, if you prefer revolvers at fifteen paces to blades, you have but to say so," continued Dallas.

"That's just what I do, for I'm not an expert with a sword, having only taken it up the past six months or so."

"Suit yourself, my dear lieutenant, and let us settle the matter now."

"Now is the time, so come out of the cabin, and the boys will mark off the distance for us," and Lieutenant Monk departed from the cabin, followed by the band, while Soto called out:

"Ho, men, drag my bed up to the door, and place them so I can see the fight, only don't stand them so that a shot will come toward me."

Several of the men did as Soto asked them, and Dallas, having thrown his heavy cloak over his shoulders, stepped out of the cabin, a revolver in his hand.

The preliminaries were soon arranged, the two adversaries were placed fifteen paces apart, and they were to march toward each other at the word, firing their revolvers as they did so.

From his bed in the door Soto was to give the word, and all being in readiness, he called out:

"Gentlemen, are you ready?"

It was a strange scene, there in that wild gorge of the mountains, the cabin forming a background, and the wounded Mexican lying upon his bed, which had been drawn close up to the door.

By the side of the door stood the negro, Dan, a piece of steak in one hand, a roasted sweet potato in the other, for the scene did not destroy his appetite in the least.

On one side of the cabin were grouped the horses of the lawless band, and opposite to the door stood the two men who were to fight to the death for the command of the guerrilla band.

Beyond them, grouped together, were the lawless men of the band, their sympathy with the stranger, whose coolness and pluck had won their admiration.

Dallas wore his heavy cloak, his slouch hat was drawn down over his eyes, to protect them more, and he held a lighted cigar between his teeth.

His adversary was calm, his eyes glaring with viciousness and anger, and determination to kill stamped upon every feature of his face.

The rain was pouring in torrents, but just then no one cared for that, and so came the words from Soto's lips, crisp, and with a certain tone of pleasure it seemed, as he kept his eyes fixed upon Antonio Dallas:

"Gentlemen, are you ready?"

"Yes!" said Monk gruffly, while Dallas bowed assent.

"Forward! March! Fire!"

With the word the two men stepped off briskly, and one pistol cracked at the word fire—the other snapped.

One man fell dead, a bullet in his heart, and the other said calmly:

"Men, those of you who think enough of your late lieutenant to bury him, had better do so."

Several of the band raised the dead man and bore him away, and the remainder crowded into the cabin before the blazing fire, more than ever impressed with their new commander, and very confident that he was not one to be trifled with.

After Dallas had set out a smoking supper for them all, Captain Gayoso, as Antonio Dallas claimed that he should be called, very quietly told his men of the plans he had formed for their guidance in the future, bade them carry Soto the next day to the nearest place where he could procure a vehicle, and then meet him at a certain rendezvous which he named, after which he threw the cloak over his shoulders, ordered Dan to bring his horse to the door, and mounting, rode away in the darkness and the storm.

Instinctively he seemed to know his way, for he had been over the mountain trail but once before, on his way to meet Soto at the cabin, and after a ride of several hours halted for a rest in the shelter of a heavy copse of timber.

Seated upon his saddle and leaning against a tree, his horse standing by him shivering with the chill of night and under the pelting storm, the man drew his cloak about him and dropped to sleep as peacefully as though in a comfortable bed within doors.

The clouds drifted away before dawn, and the rising sun, in a clear sky, awoke him, and he started to his feet, with the remark:

"I will be just in time to breakfast with General Lyon."

Throwing his saddle across the back of his horse he mounted and rode on at a rapid gait, the animal warming to his work and pulling hard on the bit, as his instinct told him there was food not far ahead.

"Halt! who comes there?"

Crisp and threatening sounded the voice; but the challenger was not visible.

Still the horseman halted and answered, while

he glanced toward a pile of rocks not far before him:

"Friend!"

"Dismount! advance and give the countersign!" came the command.

"Sentinel, I do not know your countersign; but I come here to see General Lyon as the bearer of important news."

"I will send you to him under a guard," answered the sentinel, and the corporal of the guard was called for, and appearing, the prisoner was led to the head-quarters of the Union general, distant a mile from the outpost.

The general was seated in his tent, and was a fine-looking, soldierly man, who gazed hard at the one whom the corporal led up to his quarters.

"A man to see you, sir, and he says he brings important news," said the corporal.

"Well, sir, what tidings have you, who are you, and from whence do you come?" were the terse questions of the general.

"I have something to say, General Lyon, to you alone, and I have come from the Confederate lines, while, to make myself known to you, I will simply say that I am one who has sent you important communications under the name of Antonio."

"Ah! I am glad to see you, sir, and as you seem to have had a hard night's ride of it, I will order breakfast prepared for you."

"So you are the spy Antonio?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you bring me good news, doubtless, of General Morgan and his movements?"

"I bring you news, General Lyon, of which you are the judge as to its value, while I have come to say that it will now be in my power to render you better service, as I have taken command of a guerrilla band that shall hover between the Union and Confederate forces, and my men are to play the part of spies in the lines of our enemies."

"You run great risks, sir, you and your men, and I frankly tell you I like not the spy system so largely in practice in this war; but it is my duty to take advantage of your offer, and though I will pay you for your services, if captured I can do nothing to save you, and you will have to meet the penalty of a spy."

"I fully understand that, General Lyon; but as I wish myself and my men not to be known to either army, for a recognition would cost them their lives, I would like to get from you the permission of having them wear masks when I deem it necessary for them so to do."

"This is a strange request, sir; but masked or unmasked, I suppose it is all the same, they will be spies and guerrillas, and nothing more; but do not let me catch you or your men playing a double game, or I will hang you without mercy."

Antonio Dallas did not change countenance at this, but said with the utmost calmness:

"It is our duty to play a double game, General Lyon, as spies, though of course to one side we must be true, to the other false."

"I am true to the Union cause, and the Confederates are my foes; hence I serve you, and plot against them."

"Well, your life is in your own hands, so handle it accordingly."

"Bring me valuable news, prove your worth, and you will be rewarded; but act the traitor, and you will wish that you had never been born."

Thus the interview ended, and after breakfast and a rest of a couple of hours for his horse, Antonio Dallas mounted and rode away.

Straight to the outposts of the Confederate army he rode, and being halted by a picket, asked to be taken to General Morgan.

His request was acquiesced in, and he reached the head-quarters of the Confederate general just at dark, for he had so timed it.

"Well, sir, to what circumstance am I indebted for the honor of this visit?" said General Morgan, rising and turning his bright eyes upon his visitor as he entered his tent.

"General Morgan, it is in my power to be of service to the South, and I have come to you to offer my services."

The general saw that he had no ordinary individual before him, and asked with interest in his manner:

"In what capacity do you wish to serve?"

"As a spy."

"Ah! that is a low calling for a gentleman, as you appear to be," was the response, in a voice that had a sneer of contempt in it.

"It is a calling in which I can best serve the South, sir."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, General Morgan, for the weight of one arm among so many is of little value; but one brain turned to use in the right channel can be of vast service."

"You use a clever argument, sir; but whom have I the honor of addressing?"

"My name is Antonio Dallas, sir, and I am a Texan."

"A Southerner, then?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you desire to play the spy?"

"I do, sir, and I will tell you frankly that I left the Union lines this morning, and here you will find their strength, in men, artillery and

horses, where their strongest points are, and all that may interest you," and he placed a drawing, with papers attached, before the general.

"Ah, this is valuable, and I have reason to know is correct."

"Here is a pass, sir, I have from General Lyon, and countersigned by other Federal officers."

General Morgan took the paper and looked at it, and then turned his gaze upon the spy.

"What guarantee have I, sir, that you are not a Union spy?"

"You have an officer in your command, sir, who though not friendly with me, at least knows me to be a Southerner, and not a traitor."

"Who is he?"

"Captain Darrington."

"Ah! Dashing Darrington, the Daring Dragoon, as the soldiers call him in an alliterative way!"

"Yes, sir."

"Orderly!"

At the call of the general, an orderly appeared.

"Ask Captain Darrington to be good enough to come at once to my quarters."

The orderly disappeared, and fifteen minutes after there was heard a quick, firm step advancing and Dean Darrington entered the tent.

He saluted General Morgan and then glanced at Antonio Dallas, starting slightly as he recognized him, and bowed coldly.

"Darrington, this gentleman says that you are acquainted with him?"

"Yes, general, we were classmates at West Point for nearly four years."

"Ah! he is a graduate of West Point then?"

"No, general, Mr. Dallas left West Point shortly before his term of cadetship expired, as I did also," answered Dean Darrington, generously avoiding the reason of his rival's leaving.

"He is a Southerner then?"

"Yes, sir, a Texan."

"And I would be safe to trust him in an important position?"

"I cannot conceive that Mr. Dallas could prove a traitor, sir."

"He desires to serve me as a spy."

"It is like him, General Morgan."

"He furthermore has told me that he has an organized band of spies, and will keep them between the two armies, playing a double game, but true to us, and he holds protection papers from the Union commanders, while he wishes for the safety and protection of himself and men, to wear masks when he deems it necessary."

"What do you think, Darrington?"

"Use your own judgment, please, general; but as you ask for my opinion I will give it to the effect that I believe Mr. Dallas to be a true Southerner, and though he has taken a despicable way of serving the South, we have to employ men for all positions, and he will doubtless be useful as a spy."

"As to his wearing a mask, it will not protect either his men or himself from a bullet, or a rope noose, if found necessary to use either upon them, and he naturally does not wish his face to become well known in either army."

"And you would trust him?"

"For myself, sir, I would."

"And so shall I," answered General Morgan, and half an hour after Antonio Dallas rode out of the Confederate lines, bearing protection papers from both the Northern and Southern generals, and bent upon playing a perilous double game for his own interests.

Returning to the town, where he had been spending some months, waiting to hear from Soto, he fitted himself out in the uniforms of both the Union and Confederate army, of various ranks, and procuring other disguises, donned the Southern gray and started for the rendezvous he had appointed with his guerrilla band.

This rendezvous was in a wild and dangerous part of the country, a half-way ground between the two armies, and the theater of many red deeds at the hands of men who were true to neither side, cormorants who fed upon friend and foe alike, and equally feared and despised by both Federals and Confederates.

But it was to hide his own acts, under the deeds of these lawless ruffians, that Antonio Dallas meant to do, and hence he had made his theater of action in their midst.

The particular place he had chosen for his camp was a mountain spur through which the guide, leading him to the wounded Soto, had taken him, and he had then taken in its advantages.

It was a desolate, rugged retreat, capable of hiding an army, and of being defended against an army by a handful of men, and Dallas felt that it would be a stronghold into which few would dare to venture to an attack.

As he neared the spur, and was riding through the heavy timber that skirted the base of the hills, he suddenly saw horsemen in the distance.

Halting, he examined them closely through his field-glass, and keeping himself, and his led horse bearing his outfit, concealed, he watched their approach.

"They are in the Confederate uniform, and they are my own men."

"Hail they have prisoners in their midst."

So saying he rode forward for he had recognized men of the guerrilla band whom he had seen at the cabin in the gorge, and with them Darkie Dan, as the negro whom he had bought from Soto was called.

"By the gods of war! but I know those prisoners—they are *Colonel Delafield and his beautiful daughter!*"

"Antonio Dallas, you are in luck this day!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RAIDERS.

No more bitter blow could have fallen upon Lois Delafield than the breaking out of war between the North and the South, which forced her lover to enter the Confederate army, and become arrayed against her father.

The cause of the war, the difference of opinion between those who were true to the North and those who fought for the Bonnie Blue Flag of the Sunny South, she cared not for.

She only knew that she loved with her whole soul one who was her enemy, as far as public opinion went, and that he loved her she was more than confident.

It was cruel then, she felt, that they must be as enemies, and that her father might come face to face with her lover upon the field of battle was a thought that almost drove her wild.

So she felt for a few weeks after the departure of her lover for the South, and then she became more calm, and dwelt upon all that was passing around her as an evil that must be, knowing that her breast was not alone in its anguish, for in the struggle of brother against brother, deepest sorrow to all must follow.

Her companion and devoted friend, Grace Mortimer, did much to cheer her up in the exciting days that followed the breaking out of the war; but both felt the dread of coming evil, for Colonel Delafield had received orders to go to the front upon a certain day.

"Oh, Grace! will not father take us with him?" urged Lois one day.

"I fear not, Lois," answered Grace.

"He will if you ask it, Grace, for he will do anything for you," innocently said Lois.

"Oh, Lois, do not say that; but I would really like to go to the front, for if harm befell your father we would be near to take care of him."

"Suppose you ask him," and Grace Mortimer spoke earnestly.

"Hark! he is coming now, and we will both take him by storm, as the soldiers say."

The two maidens sat together in the room of Lois, which adjoined that of Grace.

The chambers were large, elegantly furnished, and every luxury was about them; but the fair occupants were ready to give up all for the hardships of camp life, and when in answer to his knock Colonel Delafield was told to enter, he was met by earnest entreaties from Lois and Grace to take them with him to dwell in camp.

"Why, girls, give me a chance to speak, and I will tell you that I came here to ask how you would like to go, for after your camp life in Texas with me, I know you are aware of what to expect, and it will not be like taking raw recruits?"

"Oh, father!"

"Oh, Colonel Delafield," and while Grace clasped the hand of the gallant soldier, Lois kissed him warmly.

"Well, I have orders to start to-morrow, and I go to Tennessee, so you must get ready, and mind you, go in marching trim, no silks and velvets, but just what clothing you need for service."

"One trunk each, and no Saratoga storehouses, your riding-habits, stout boots, gauntlet-gloves, and hats, and bonnets and feathers to be left at home."

"I take the six o'clock train for Washington, and if my fair volunteers are not ready they will be left behind."

"We will be ready, father, you may rest assured," said Lois.

And ready they were, and one week after Colonel Delafield was in command of a brigade of infantry in the Southwest, and his head-quarters in a handsome mansion, deserted by its former occupants, were the center of attraction to all the officers in the army, young and old, drawn thither by the "bright particular stars," Lois Delafield and Grace Mortimer.

Then, for the first time since he bade her farewell, to don the gray from his sense of duty, did Lois Delafield hear of Dean Darrington, and it made her heart throb with joy, for his foes spoke of his daring and gallantry with admiration, little dreaming all that he was to her.

She heard his name often mentioned, and though in honor, with dread, for orders were issued to "double the pickets and reinforce the outer lines, or Darrington's Black-Horse Rangers will be in upon us to-night."

Again it would be:

"Darrington's Black Horse Rangers captured a wagon-train last night," and again:

"Darrington and his Black Horse Cavalry burned the bridge in our rear last night."

"Why do you not capture this Captain Darrington, Major Mountjoy?" she asked a dashing

young cavalryman, who, with half a dozen other officers were dining at the Delafield headquarters one day.

"Did you ever hear of a Will-o'-the-Wisp being captured, Miss Delafield?" was the ambiguous reply.

"No, I confess that I never did; but is there nothing more substantial to this Confederate Captain of Dragoons than a Will-o'-the-Wisp?"

"Indeed there is, for he does us a great deal of damage, only he is as hard to capture as a spirit, for I have laid traps for him, had him hemmed in, with his command, fought him with odds greatly in my favor, and yet he always escapes, and never fails to leave a cruel souvenir behind him."

"You are frank and generous, Major Mountjoy, to admit an enemy's triumph over you as you do," said Lois, her heart beating with pride at the admiration felt for her lover by his foes.

"He is in fact, Miss Delafield, a splendid fellow, as I have heard from several of his classmates who belong to our division, for he was a cadet at West Point, but did not go through the whole term, I believe, as he was a wealthy Mississippi planter, and returned to his home to enjoy a life of luxury."

"There is a young officer here, Captain Carter Tennyson, who was his bosom friend at West Point, and speaks of him as the best shot, most skillful rider, the finest hand with the sword, and the most generous-hearted fellow there, one whose hand was ever ready to protect a new cadet, and had a pocketbook for those who needed aid."

"You give a glowing account of him, Major Mountjoy; but, oh! what is the matter?"

All sprung to their feet as there came the sound of rapid firing, followed by shouts and cheers, the tramping of hoofs, and then the cry:

"The Rebels! the Rebels!"

Colonel Delafield and the officers present rushed to the door to defend themselves, and following close upon their heels were Lois and Grace Mortimer.

As they reached the piazza, a squadron of cavalry dashed by, and they were dressed in gray!"

They had just cut their way through the scattered camp of an infantry regiment near, and were bearing away with them four pieces of artillery, which they had captured half a mile back.

There were a hundred or more of them, and they were mounted upon jet-black horses, while at their head rode Dean Darrington.

He had made a sudden dash into an unprotected part of the Federal line, picked up the four guns, and was riding like the wind to escape with his prizes ere the Union soldiers, in large force a mile distant, should come down upon and annihilate him.

"Great God! it is Darrington himself!" cried Colonel Delafield, excitedly, as he recognized the young Confederate.

"Come! to the rescue of those guns!"

And the gallant Major Mountjoy, his sword in one hand, his revolver in the other, would have sprung down from the piazza to try and check the daring raiders; but Colonel Delafield seized his arm and said sternly:

"Hold, Mountjoy! it is needless to attempt it! Ha! he salutes!"

And just then, dashing by within fifty feet of the quarters, Dean Darrington raised his plumed hat, bent low in the saddle, and swept on, his men close upon the heels of his superb black horse, and the captured artillery in a square of Confederate troopers, all riding like the wind.

There were some in the Southern band who would have fired, from their actions, as they beheld the half-dozen soldiers about the headquarters of Colonel Delafield, but Dean Darrington was seen to turn quickly in his saddle, raise his hand in warning, and give some order, and in silence the Black Horse Rangers dashed on out of sight.

Into the woods they dashed, firing followed, shouts, and then all was silent, proving that they had broken through the picket line.

Then came the thundering tread of a large force of cavalry, and into view dashed several hundred gallant "boys in blue," in hot pursuit.

Bidding a hasty adieu to Colonel Delafield and the ladies, Major Mountjoy mounted his horse, and placing himself at the head of the battalion, for they were his own men, he led them in hot chase after the Black Horse Rangers, the hope in his heart that he could bring back a prisoner the daring rebel dragoon.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CAPTURE.

MAJOR MOUNTJOY was doomed to return in disappointment, for the Black Horse Rangers, although retarded by the cannon they had captured, managed to regain their lines after a running fight of miles.

"I shall some day capture him, Miss Delafield," he said, confidently, to Lois, who was standing upon the piazza, awaiting the coming of her father, with whom she was going to ride around the lines.

"Seeing will be believing, major," laughed Lois, her heart throbbing with delight at the

cape of her lover, though she was loyal to the stars and stripes, even if she did love a dashing young Confederate captain.

Lois looked superbly beautiful, clad as she was in her riding-habit, and with a slouch hat and heavy black plume shading her face.

In her gauntlet-gloved hand she carried a gold-handled whip, a present from Dean Darrington, when she had last seen him in New York.

And Marsden Mountjoy sighed as he looked upon her radiant beauty, and wondered if ever he could win her heart for all his own.

"I can but try, and I will," he murmured, as he was about to ride away.

"Oh, Major Mountjoy?" called out Lois in her sweet way.

"Well, Miss Delafield?"

"Are you *very* tired after your long chase after the Confederates?"

"No, Miss Delafield."

"If not, and you care to be my escort on a ride around the lines, I shall be most happy to have you, for father will accompany Grace."

"I shall be delighted, Miss Delafield," was the response, and half an hour after they started upon their jaunt, Colonel Delafield and Grace leading the way, Major Mountjoy and Lois following, and an orderly and two cavalrymen bringing up the rear.

From point to point they went, and then, by a heavy thunder shower were driven to an officer's tent for shelter.

After the storm had passed they mounted their horses, and coming to a part of the lines where the pickets were few and far between, pressed on rapidly, as they knew the Confederates haunted that locality at times.

"Ah! the bridge is gone!" cried Colonel Delafield, as he drew rein upon the bank of a swollen stream, the waters of which, raised by the torrents of rain that had fallen, had carried away the bridge.

"There is a bridge something over half a mile below, sir," said Major Mountjoy.

"Then we will have to go there, though even now we are out of our lines," the colonel remarked.

"Yes, sir, and this is dangerous ground; but we can do nothing else that I can see," said Major Mountjoy, and they set off at a gallop down the stream.

They came, after a ride of ten minutes, to where a bridge crossed to an island an acre or so in size, and from thence a second rude structure crossed to the mainland.

The island was thickly overgrown with underbrush, and Colonel Delafield remarked, as they rode upon the first bridge:

"If we see any Confederates anywhere, it will be here, Mountjoy."

"Yes, sir, and we had better dash on rapidly, for we are a mile from our nearest picket."

On they went at a sweeping gallop, and the bridge echoed loudly under the fall of their horses' hoofs.

Across they went upon the island, and grouped close together they sped along through the thicket-guarded road until they came in sight of the second bridge.

Then they suddenly drew rein, for upon the bridge before them they saw half a dozen horsemen.

"Back the way we came!" cried the colonel, and they wheeled about, for those they had seen had not been in the blue uniform.

But again they drew rein, for the bridge they had just crossed was now occupied by half a dozen horsemen.

"Colonel, you follow with the ladies, while I try and cut through with your orderly and my man," cried Mountjoy.

But instantly the horsemen leveled their carbines, and a stern voice ordered:

"Halt! you are prisoners, so surrender and do not force us to fire upon you!"

"It is madness to resist, Mountjoy, so we can but surrender," sadly said the colonel, realizing how wholly at the mercy of their foes they were.

"I will at least attempt to escape, ride to the nearest force we have, and endeavor to rescue you, sir."

"Good-by."

And the plucky young major suddenly wheeled his horse and darted into the thicket, unheeding the cries of the maidens for him to return, and the words of Colonel Delafield:

"It is madness, Mountjoy, for you will but throw your life away!"

Into the thicket, however, dashed the daring man, and shouts were heard from the horsemen, and several rode in rapid chase, while others came forward to meet Colonel Delafield and those with him.

Those who had been entrapped sat in sad silence upon their horses as their foes came toward them; then they heard shots, shouts, a plunge, a cheer in the ringing voice of Major Mountjoy, and one of the horsemen in chase shouted:

"He has plunged into the river."

"After him, or he will escape and bring the blue-coats upon us!"

Colonel Delafield and his party could hardly strain a cheer of joy at the success of the ma-

jer's gallant act, and they hoped that the words of their captor would be verified.

The next moment a man rode up to them who acted as an officer evidently, though he showed no insignia of rank, and in fact, from his uniform it was hard to tell just what army he belonged to.

Behind him came several of his followers, and from the direction of the other bridge appeared as many more.

"Well, sir, who are you?" demanded Colonel Delafield, sternly.

"That is the question I intended to put to you, sir," was the response of the one addressed.

"I am Colonel Dorsey Delafield, of the Union army."

"And I am Lieutenant Vilas, of the Confederate Rangers," answered his captor.

"Villain would be a more appropriate name, to judge by his face," whispered Lois to Grace, while she added aloud:

"Do you mean Captain Darrington's Black Horse Rangers, sir?"

"No, miss, we do not belong to Darrington's Black Horse; but we are Confederates, and you are our prisoners—Ho, Sellers! did he escape?" and he turned to a man who just then dashed up.

"He did, sure, although we wounded both him and his horse; but he's a good one, and will have a regiment down upon us in half an hour's time."

"Then we must be off: you, sir," and the man turned to Colonel Delafield, "must ride by my side, and if you give me your *parole* not to escape I will not bind you—"

"Bind me, an officer of the Union army, sir?" indignantly said the colonel.

"Oh, yes, for we take few chances."

"You surely will allow the ladies to return to our lines, though you keep my two men and myself?"

"No, sir, I shall keep the ladies also."

"What! do you make ladies prisoners?"

"I do."

"You certainly cannot belong to the Confederate army and must—"

"What?" asked the man, as Colonel Delafield paused.

"Must belong to the guerrilla bands that infest the country between the two armies."

The man laughed rudely, and, placing Colonel Delafield between two of his men, and a horseman by the side of Lois and Grace, they started off at a canter.

As Colonel Delafield saw the swollen stream, from the bridge, he called back to his daughter and Grace:

"Mountjoy dared a great deal, and I only hope was successful."

"Oh, he had nerve, he had, and he killed one of our boys and two horses in his run," said one of the captors.

Crossing the bridge Colonel Delafield saw other horsemen fall in behind them, and a glance at their faces and make-up caused him to mutter:

"My word on it that they are Gayoso's guerrillas!"

A ride of some ten miles at a rapid canter brought them suddenly in view of a horseman, and they came to a halt.

The next instant the horseman came forward rapidly, and the men said in chorus:

"It's the captain!"

"Lois! do you not know that gentleman?" cried the colonel, excitedly.

"It is Mr. Dallas."

"Alas! it is Antonio Dallas," echoed Grace Mortimer, and she turned very pale, as the one whose name she spoke came toward them, dressed in the uniform of a Confederate captain.

CHAPTER XVI.

TREACHERY, NOT FRIENDSHIP.

"COLONEL DELAFIELD! this is indeed a surprise to meet you, your daughter, and you too, Miss Mortimer."

Such was the greeting of Antonio Dallas to Colonel Delafield and the maidens, and he warmly held out his hand to each, and they greeted him with cordiality, at least the colonel and Lois did, while Grace Mortimer's manner was exceedingly cold and forbidding.

"What does it all mean, for you certainly appear to be prisoners?" he asked.

In a few words Colonel Delafield explained the situation, and asked, when he had done so:

"And you are in the Confederate army, Dallas, and wear the rank of captain, I see?"

"Yes, sir, I am a rebel," was the laughing reply.

"I might have known it, for you are a Texan, and all you Southerners are true to the Sunny South; but what is to be our fate, and I confess I am glad we have met you, for I half-way doubted that our captors were Confederate soldiers, and were fearful that they were some of Gayoso, the Guerrilla's band."

"They are my own men, Colonel Delafield, and, as an old friend I will say that you are not only safe, but I shall take it upon myself to return you to your lines."

"Indeed! do you dare do such a thing, Dallas?"

"I shall dare do it, sir."

"I would not have you get into trouble thereby, and am willing, as a soldier, to take the consequences of my capture; but the ladies, I

will be most glad if you would allow them to return to our lines."

"I shall release your party as it is, Colonel Delafield, and go myself with you until you reach the Federal lines."

"This is indeed most noble of you, Captain Dallas, and I only hope that you will not get into trouble thereby, and if you do, send me word, and I will return and deliver myself up as a prisoner to you," said the noble old officer.

"I shall not ask it, sir, I assure you."

"It is more than we could ask, Captain Dallas, and from my inmost heart I thank you," and Lois held forth her hand.

The eyes of Antonio Dallas flashed with triumph as he grasped the tiny, gloved hand, while he answered:

"For your sake, Miss Delafield, I would do far more than set your father free; but let me have a word with my lieutenant, and then I will ride back with you," and Antonio Dallas rode apart from the others, motioning for Vilas to follow him.

"Well, you have made a bad capture, Vilas," he said.

"I think it's a good one, cap'n," was the blunt reply.

"I say no, for they are friends of mine, and I shall set them free."

"Colonel Delafield is rich, cap'n, for I know about him, and he has a crack command they call a legion among the blue-coats, and he'll pay well to get off with a whole skin and get the girls free too."

"It is my intention to set them free without ransom."

"The boys won't have it, cap'n."

"They must," was the stern rejoinder.

"Well, sir, you can talk it over with them and see."

"I wish no trouble now, nor will I have any, so you go on to the rendezvous, and tell them I will see that they lose nothing by my setting these prisoners free."

"I am more than willing, cap'n, as they are friends of yours, and I'll stand by you; but the boys know their rights, and they'll fight for 'em."

"Ah! you mean that they will refuse to obey me?"

"They will do so, cap'n."

"They had better not," was the threatening remark.

"Cap'n, the boys know the value of these prisoners, and more, a young blood as was with them made his escape, after killing one of our men, wounding another and dropping two horses for us, and there'll be trouble if you don't make the colonel pay ransom."

"I shall not, and the men must obey me."

"Ho, men! this way!" and in response to Dallas's loud call, the band of guerrillas rode toward where he and Vilas sat apart upon their horses, all but three of them who remained to guard the prisoners.

"Men, do you understand that I am your leader?" asked Dallas, as the men grouped about him.

"We do," came in a chorus of voices.

"Well, I wish you to trust in me, and feel that I will act for your good in all things."

"I have just come from the town and intend to establish a camp, and work for your interests; but I find that you have captured some old friends of mine, and it is my intention to set them free."

"Pay for them first, cap'n," said a large fellow with red hair, a face almost the same hue, and small, wicked blue eyes.

"I shall not pay for them, for I feel that I have a right to do as I please."

"No, cap'n, you hain't no right to take money out of our pockets."

"What do you wish?"

"Pay for the old man and the girls," answered the red-headed fellow, and his words met with universal approbation.

"I will not be driven, sir, and I order you to ride on to the rendezvous at once, and I will be there by night and settle this matter."

"Settle now, Cap."

"What! do you defy my authority?" and Antonio Dallas's face became white with rage.

"We know what these prisoners are wu'th, Cap, and they would pay a large sum to go free, so if you don't want your friends to stay prisoners, just pay for them, and that settles it," and the ringleader of the malcontents glanced around to see if he was fully supported in the stand that he took.

It was very evident that the guerrillas meant to stand by him, as far as he dared go.

They had seen their new chief aroused, and knew that he was able to take care of himself.

They also had an idea that he was playing a part, as their captain, and was really a commissioned Confederate officer, and this caused them to stand the more in awe of him.

But they felt that he had no right to rob them of a ransom, and as their red-headed ringleader took a bold stand against his doing so, they urged him on to see if Dallas would not yield when he saw the odds against him.

But Antonio Dallas was no coward, nor was he the man to back down from trifles, as the reader has seen, and he made up his mind to teach a

lesson then and there that would check insubordination.

"My man, I command this company, and it is my will to set these prisoners free, and you oppose my doing so at your peril, so do not again urge your demand," he said, sternly, addressing the ringleader.

But the man had not been at the cabin, when the fight had occurred between Dallas and the lieutenant, and he had a great deal of confidence in his own powers, so meant to hold on to the last.

He believed that he would be backed up fully by his comrades, and, if even forced to take the life of his captain, he would do so, after which he would proclaim himself leader.

He was ambitious, and this, added to his desire to get a golden ransom from the colonel and his party, made him reckless, so he said bluntly:

"Your threats do not scare me, Cap, and I shall have matters my own way."

He had anticipated that the quarrel would continue for a while, and gradually lead up to a tragedy, in which he would play the part of triumphant tragedian.

But he did not know the man he had to deal with, and consequently did not understand that Antonio Dallas was not one to be caught in a trap.

He saw just what the ringleader was after, knew that the trouble must come in the end, so determined to at once check it, and quick as a flash his revolver covered the heart of the man and his finger touched the trigger with a vicious:

"Take that, sir!"

A yell of rage, fright and pain commingled broke from the lips of the man, and he sunk down upon the ground in a heap, writhing in agony.

"Ho, men, do you take up the quarrel of that rebellious dog?" and a revolver in each hand, Antonio Dallas faced the band, who had started forward at his bold and deadly act, and now slunk back, cowed by his daring and determined front.

Colonel Delafield saw the act, as did Lois and Grace Mortimer, for they were attentively watching the scene from where they sat upon their horses a hundred or more feet distant, well knowing that there was trouble brewing.

"Ha! there is deadly work there! but Dallas has taken a bold stand that holds his men in check," cried the colonel, while Lois said:

"Oh, father! will they not kill him?"

"Would to God they did," came from the lips of Grace Mortimer, in a hoarse whisper; but it was unheeded by Colonel Delafield and Lois at the moment, even if they heard and realized what she had said.

"No, his daring front and deadly act holds them at bay, and he is master now, for they fall back cowed before him," answered Colonel Delafield, and as he spoke he saw the lawless horsemen, in obedience to some low-given order from Antonio Dallas, turn and ride slowly away.

Watching their departure for a moment, Antonio called out something to Vilas, which Colonel Delafield did not hear, and then riding back to where the prisoners awaited him, he said sternly, addressing the three guards:

"Be off after your comrades, men, and carry with you the body of that rebellious wretch that I was forced to kill."

The three men saluted politely and rode away, leaving Antonio Dallas alone with Colonel Delafield and his party, toward whom his apparent friendship was treachery in disguise.

CHAPTER XVII.

UNDER TWO FLAGS.

WHEN Antonio Dallas saw his band disappear from sight in the timber, he turned to Colonel Delafield and said:

"Now, sir, we will ride back to your lines, and I think you will meet no more enemies."

"But you surely do not intend to accompany us," said Colonel Delafield, as Dallas rode along with them.

"Yes, sir; I shall go along with you."

"I sincerely hope not, Dallas, for my influence cannot do for you, I fear, what you have done for me."

"You mean that I will be held as a prisoner?" asked Dallas, with a smile.

"You certainly will be, notwithstanding the good service you have rendered me and mine."

"Wait and see, Colonel Delafield; and now will you excuse me if I drop behind for awhile, for I shall soon overtake you?"

"Captain, I fully appreciate all that you have done, and I hope some day to prove that appreciation; but I cannot allow you to risk your liberty, if not your life, by going with us nearer to our lines, so I must beg that you bid us farewell here."

And Colonel Delafield seemed really annoyed at the persistency of the man who had so well served him.

"Wait and see if I run any risk, colonel," said Dallas, with a light laugh.

And with a wave of his hand he rode back a few paces and disappeared in a thicket, leaving Colonel Delafield at a halt, wondering at his strange conduct.

Seeing that her father had halted, Lois drew

rein, at the same time calling to Grace to do likewise, for the latter was riding ahead of her in the narrow pathway, the orderly and soldier being in front.

"Why, father, has Captain Dallas left without saying good-by to us?" asked Lois.

"My child, he said he would soon join us again, though why he insists upon placing himself in jeopardy of becoming a prisoner I cannot see."

"Perhaps he knows of other Confederate cavalry hereabout, and wishes to pass us through their lines?"

"Ah! that may be; but I only hope he will not get into trouble through serving us."

"He will not, Colonel Delafield, I feel confident, as Antonio Dallas knows just what he is about," said Grace Mortimer, with some bitterness of tone.

"Oh, Grace, I fear you do not like Captain Dallas," said Colonel Delafield, while Lois added:

"Grace has something against Captain Dallas, I am sure."

"I confess that I do not like him; but then I am prejudiced perhaps, from some woman's whim," was the reply.

"Let us ride on again, for I do not like this neighborhood, and it is fully half a mile to our nearest outpost," and so saying, Colonel Delafield started forward once more, while Lois said, sadly:

"I sincerely hope that Major Mountjoy made his escape, and was not wounded."

"I hope so from my heart, my child; but it seems to me that had he escaped ere this he would have had cavalry coming to our rescue, as he has had ample time."

"You do not think he can be killed, colonel?" asked Grace.

"I hope not; but those fellows said that they wounded both him and his horse, and as we have seen no advance from our men, I hardly know what to think, so fear that Mountjoy has not reached our lines— Ah! there is some one coming!"

All turned in the direction of the sound, which came from behind them, and beheld a horseman coming at a gallop toward them.

"It is Major Mountjoy," cried Lois, catching a glimpse of a blue uniform through the trees.

"Heaven grant it," fervently said Colonel Delafield.

"No, it is Captain Dallas," remarked Grace, catching sight of his face.

"And in Federal uniform," Lois said.

"Great God! what does he mean?"

"This must not be allowed," cried Colonel Delafield, sternly, and he turned quickly toward Antonio Dallas, who just then rode up, wearing a handsome new uniform of a captain in the United States army.

"Well, Dallas, what does this mean?" sternly said Colonel Delafield, at a loss to account for the strange conduct of the Texan.

"It means, colonel, that I have changed my colors, for I now wear the blue outside and the gray beneath, whereas before I had my uniforms reversed."

"Ah, Captain Dallas, you would meet a spy's fate were you taken by our men now, and nothing could save you from the gallows," sadly said Colonel Delafield.

"Captain Dallas, how could you be so rash?"

"Return, I beg you, to your lines," Lois said, anxiously.

"Captain Dallas, it seems, is playing some deep and double game evidently," and Grace Mortimer's lip curled with scorn as she uttered the words.

"Miss Mortimer is right; I am serving under two flags, the Stars and Stripes and the Bonnie Blue, and I change my colors to suit the situation."

"Awhile since I was a Confederate captain; but now I am a Union officer," and Dallas smiled in his cunning way, and in his smile there was a world of mystery and meaning.

"Captain Dallas, I think some explanation is due to me," and Colonel Delafield spoke in an injured tone.

"Granted, colonel, and in confidence I will tell you, for I wish it to go no further, that I am in the secret service of your army."

"Now, sir, let us ride on, for I do not wish to be caught by the Confederates while in the blue uniform," and the party moved forward once more, the soldiers, some distance ahead, completely mystified by the strange metamorphosis of the man who had rescued them from the Confederates, and yet now appeared as a Union officer.

A few moments more and they came in sight of the outer pickets of the Union army, and being at once recognized, Colonel Delafield was permitted to pass with his party, while inquiry developed the fact that Major Mountjoy had not been seen, but his horse, riderless and badly wounded, had come dashing up to the picket an hour or so before.

"Poor Mountjoy! I fear his recklessness has cost him his life," said Colonel Delafield, sadly, and the party rode rapidly on, a feeling of gloom in their hearts at the uncertain fate of the gallant young major, who had so daringly attempted to escape with such fearful odds against him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A STRANGE INTERVIEW.

THE evening following the day of adventure for Colonel Delafield and his party, and which had so nearly proven disastrous for them, at least as regarded their liberty, Grace Mortimer was standing upon the piazza of the mansion, which was used as head-quarters, gazing with interest at the moon rising over the distant hills.

Colonel Delafield had ridden over to the army head-quarters to see if aught could be learned regarding the fate of Major Mountjoy, and Lois was in the parlor entertaining several officers who had called upon the young ladies, and to whom Grace had excused herself upon the plea of indisposition.

The face of the maiden, as the moonlight fell upon it, was sad, and tears were trembling in her eyes, as though bitter memories were called up by the scene and hour.

Suddenly a horseman rode up toward the mansion, dismounted and started toward the house.

He paused, as he saw those in the parlor, then approached in a stealthy way, and taking up different positions, managed to discover just who was within.

Leaving the piazza he strolled around the house, and suddenly halted, as he beheld the form of Grace Mortimer, standing upon the piazza at one end of the mansion.

"It is she, for she certainly was not in the parlor; and it can be no other."

Ascending the piazza, as he spoke, he walked along with the noiseless step of an Indian, and halting by the side of the young girl, said softly:

"What! Miss Mortimer in a mood romantic, that she is gazing at the moonlight?"

Grace started, uttered a slight exclamation, and turning quickly answered:

"Ah! it is you, Mr. Dallas?"

"Yes, fair Grace, and I am glad to find you alone, for I came here to-night, hoping to have that pleasure."

"Why do you dog my life, Antonio Dallas, when all that was between us in the past is ended?" she asked bitterly.

"I do not dog your life, Grace; but as circumstances have thrown us together, I watch you for my own safety."

"You fear me then?"

"I fear your tongue."

"Ah! you know that I can tell strange stories of you?" she said with an air of triumph.

"Bah! so can I tell strange stories, and I believe that your plot for gain will keep you silent, though I fear you may put stumbling-blocks in my way."

"I do not understand you, for I have no plot."

"You cannot deceive me."

"Nor do I care to."

"You would have me out of the way."

"Frankly as you say it, so frankly I answer, that I would to God that you were dead," and she spoke almost fiercely.

"I believe you would murder me, did you dare?"

"No, I am no murderer, sir."

"Yet your father kill—"

"Oh, spare me!" she pleaded.

"Well, it is right that you should keep in mind that your father escaped the gallows by flight, and is now hiding under an assumed name, and I alone know where to find him."

"If you will do as I desire, he is safe; but if you betray me, by word, writing, look or act, I shall drag him from his hiding-place and he shall hang."

"Vent your revenge upon me, and spare him," moaned Grace.

"I will spare you, too, if you do as I wish, and so I came to tell you to-night."

"I saw by your looks to-day that you were taking a course toward me that would force you to explain to Colonel Delafield and his daughter."

"Now the colonel loves you, that I see most plainly, and I am not surprised, for you are very winning, and very beautiful."

"He is rich, commands a brigade, and will long be a brigadier and command a division, so he will win fame."

"His daughter loves you as she would her own sister, and I believe she is anxious that her father should make you his wife."

"Great God! do you mean what you say?" gasped Grace.

"Why not, for you have but to say yes when he offers his heart and hand."

"I, your wife, accept the hand of another, one whom I admire, respect, and who has been to me as father, brother, friend?" and Grace Mortimer spoke with an indignation she did not attempt to conceal.

"You know best, Grace," was the cool reply.

"You can do as you please, and I will do as I please."

"And your desire is to consummate some act of deviltry?"

"My desire is to make Miss Delafield my wife."

"Oh, villain! but she is deeply in love with Captain Darrington, thank Heaven, and er-

gaged to him, though he stands now in the light of a foe, fighting as he is against the North, and you can never win more than her friendship, while, if she knew you as you are, as I do, her contempt and hatred you would get instead."

"She must know me as I appear, Grace; and if she treats me with other than kindness, I will know that she gets her cue from you, and, so help me Heaven, your father shall be the sufferer."

"Remain quiescent, keep your pretty teeth closed regarding me, and all will be well; but fail me, and you know the worst, and it shall strike you through your father."

"God forgive me if, with such a threat, I am forced to remain silent, and see you triumph; but I feel that you cannot, for Lois Delafield is not one to give her love away."

"Leave that to me, Grace, and I will win her, while I keep your secret, and your father's."

"Tell me! are you a Union spy, Antonio Dallas?"

"I am an officer in the Secret Service of the United States," he said, evasively.

"That means a spy, and, after what power I saw you hold to-day over the Confederates, I feel confident that you are playing too deep a double game to long escape, and so I shall live in hopes."

"Of what?"

"Of hearing some day that Captain Antonio Dallas, of the Secret Service, has been caught in the Confederate lines and executed as a spy, for General Morgan is no man to trifle with, from all accounts."

And the moonlight revealed an almost wicked expression upon the face of Grace Mortimer as she spoke.

"You will be disappointed," the man answered, rudely.

"I shall pray not to be; but when do you enter the lines of the Confederates again?"

"Within the next twenty-four hours."

"Will you not endeavor to find out the fate that has befallen Major Mountjoy, and in some way let Colonel Delafield know?"

"Ah! he is to be my rival, from what I have heard, for the hand of the fair Lois," said Antonio Dallas, quickly.

"She certainly would bestow her affection, were it not already pledged, upon a man of honor, rather than upon yourself," was the cutting retort.

"Still severe, I see; but I warn you not to be so when we meet in company, for I shall quite often visit these head-quarters to look after my interests; but now, farewell, and in parting I give you another warning not to put the slightest barrier in the way of my success."

And raising his hat, Antonio Dallas walked away.

Leaving the little piazza, he went around to the front of the mansion and walked up to the front door.

There a soldier was pacing to and fro, and saluting, the guerrilla spy passed into the spacious hallway, and thence into the parlors.

Lois was still there with four officers, who were visiting her, and at the coming of Dallas she arose and greeted him pleasantly, after which she presented him to her guests as an old friend of her father, and the one who had served them so well that day, for she had just been relating their adventures.

The officers gazed at Dallas with considerable interest, for they had heard how he had shot a Confederate to quell insubordination that had broken out among the captors of Colonel Delafield at his being allowed to go free, and knowing him to be boldly serving under two flags, though in reality a Union officer, they regarded him as a remarkable personage.

Antonio Dallas could make himself really fascinating at will, was handsome, well-formed, talked well, and chatted pleasantly for half an hour, and then, at the request of Lois, sung several war-ballads in a superb tenor voice, so that when he arose to take his leave he had won the admiration of the officers, who begged him to visit them at their quarters when he so willed.

"You will not remain to see my father, Captain Dallas, for he will soon return?" Lois asked.

"Thank you, but I must depart upon an important mission, and, as my duty calls me again into the Confederate lines, I will endeavor to ascertain the fate of your friend, Major Mountjoy, and, if possible, aid in his escape, if he is a prisoner."

"It will be so kind of you, Captain Dallas; but be cautious yourself, for you carry your life in your hands."

"As every soldier does, Miss Delafield," and grasping Lois's hand in farewell he took his departure, mounted his horse, and rode straight for the Confederate lines.

When day dawned he was riding through the camps of the Southerners, dressed in his gray uniform as a Confederate captain.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CAPTURE.

At the time of the capture on the island, of Colonel Delafield and his party, by the lawless lot who were Confederates or United States sol-

diers, to suit their own convenience, Major Mountjoy determined to make a bold dash for liberty, as the reader has seen.

He was a man of quick resolves, and fearless to recklessness, and though he saw that the chances were greatly against him, he made up his mind to risk his life to escape.

He knew that he could only submit as a prisoner, where, free, he might gain the Union picket, spread an alarm, and lead a cavalry squadron to the rescue of the prisoners, ere they could regain their own lines, for the disputed ground between the two armies was miles in width.

He therefore waved his farewell, settled himself well in his saddle, drew his revolver and spurred into the thicket.

He was soon discovered, and a wild yell arose from the guerrillas as they beheld him charging boldly for the bridge, as though to attempt to cut through their lines.

Pell-mell they rushed for the bridge, to there head him off and have the struggle out, and the result was that while they were flying in that direction, Major Mountjoy, who had made this feint for the purpose obtained, had wheeled his horse to the right and was flying for the lower end of the island.

Arriving at the bridge the guerrillas had discovered that they had been tricked, for their foe was three hundred yards away and evidently determined to take to the river.

Instantly they opened a fusilade upon him, some starting in pursuit down the island, others crossing the bridge and taking along the other shore, while a few remained as a guard to prevent any others of the captives from making a rush across.

Halting for an instant upon reaching the bank, Major Mountjoy saw that he had to make a leap into the swollen torrent, so he boldly spurred his horse to the effort.

With a heavy plunge the splendid animal went down, half sunk beneath the turbid flood, was whirled around in an eddy, and it seemed for an instant that he must go under with his rider.

But, urged by his master, he made a tremendous effort, got out of the whirlpool, and went down with the seething current at a tremendous speed.

Watching closely the while, and perfectly cool, Major Mountjoy gradually swayed the animal toward the other shore, and before very long succeeded in reaching it.

As his horse clambered up the bank the coming guerrillas fired hotly upon him, and Major Mountjoy felt a sudden shock which well-nigh knocked him out of the saddle; but he recovered himself quickly, and saw that a bullet had shivered the butt of his revolver in the holster.

Another shot just clipped his shoulder, and feeling his horse give a bound into the air, and at the same time utter a startled snort, he knew that the animal was wounded, though how seriously he could not tell.

"Well, I must go toward the Confederate lines to escape them, for my revolvers are wet and useless, and that is my only chance."

"I will ride for yonder thick timber," he said, as he beheld the guerrillas dashing on in chase, and that he was cut off from seeking his own lines just then.

There were but three guerrillas in chase, and these seemed not to be very well mounted, so urging his horse onward, the noble animal, wounded though he was, soon dropped his pursuers so far behind that they turned and gave up the pursuit, and a few moments after Major Mountjoy rode into the heavy copse of timber.

He knew that he was yet by no means safe, for though he had dropped his pursuers, he was liable to run upon Confederates at any instant, and with revolvers that were useless, and a wounded horse, he felt that the chances were greatly against him.

However, he determined to make a wide circuit, and endeavor thereby to reach his lines and, anxious to attempt the rescue of Colonel Delafield, he urged his horse on at a rapid gallop, gradually bending toward the Union camps.

But the noble animal began to show signs of weakness, for his wound in the flank was bleeding freely and could not be stanched.

He had thus far saved his master, and with deep pain did the gallant major see him stagger along.

"I have not the heart to strike you, my noble horse, for you are doing your best— Ha! I have here Miss Delafield's riding-whip, which she gave me to hold for her while she fastened up her hair."

"This is a little souvenir she prizes most highly, as she says it was a present from a very dear friend."

And he held up a handsome riding-whip, which hung by a cord about his waist.

It had a gold handle, in the end of which was set a ruby, and around the gem were engraved the words:

"Now who can this D. D. be?"

"A man, of course, for women do not give riding-whips to women, that is certain."

"Let me see! I do not know any officer in our immediate command who has those initials, and he must be a soldier, else why the meeting at West Point?"

"The last initials are the same, so perhaps he is her cousin, and was a cadet at West Point."

"I graduated in the class of '56, and let me see if I can recall any of the cadets whose initials were D. D."

And so Major Mountjoy rode on, cogitating with a pang of jealousy upon the donor of the handsome whip to Lois.

Presently his horse stumbled badly, staggered and nearly fell.

Instantly the major sprung to the ground.

"My poor horse, I have not the heart to push you on, wounded as you are."

"Rest, old fellow, and if you are mortally wounded, I will not desert you to die alone."

He removed the saddle as he spoke and then took off the bridle, for the animal was suffering greatly.

"The wound is mortal, old fellow; but a soldier's horse must expect to meet the fate a soldier must face."

"Ah! you lie down, and it is to never rise again."

And the voice of the brave officer choked with emotion as he saw the suffering of his splendid steed.

Kneeling beside the now prostrate animal, the major caressed his head, the large eyes of the dying beast turning upon him with a look of gratitude almost human.

Bleeding to death, the life-tide of the horse gradually ebbed away, his breath came shorter and shorter, and at last he gave a sigh that seemed wrung from his heart, and the soldier's steed was dead.

"Dead, my noble friend, for friend you have been to me, and often have you saved my life."

As though the dumb brute had been a human friend, Major Mountjoy stood gazing down upon him for a moment with deep sorrow at his loss.

Then he stepped forward to take up his saddle and bridle, and go on his way, when suddenly there rung out in a stern, deep voice:

"Hold, sir! for you are my prisoner!"

Quick as a flash did Major Mountjoy drop his hand upon his sword-hilt, and as the weapon was drawn from its scabbard, he faced the one who had come so unexpectedly upon him.

"Ah! you wish to try your strength with me?" cried the one who had come upon the scene so suddenly, and dropping his revolver, which he held in his hand, he, too, drew his sword, as the major sprung upon him.

At a glance Major Mountjoy had seen but one person confronting him.

That one was a man of striking presence, clad in the handsome gray uniform of a Confederate captain of cavalry, and with his pants tucked in knee-boots, upon the heels of which were spurs of gold, as they appeared to be.

The wide-brimmed black slouch hat he wore, with its sable ostrich plume, shaded, but did not hide his handsome face, and Major Mountjoy saw that he had not to deal with an ordinary individual.

Beholding, in his hurried glance, that he had but one foe to meet, he had determined to risk a pistol-shot and attack him with his sword, and hence he had drawn his blade and sprung toward him.

Generously his foe had discarded his revolver and met him with the sword, and the weapons came together with a clash.

Thus, with their blades crossed, the two men gazed into each other's face.

Both were fearless, and both were confident; but the Confederate said calmly:

"Major, for I recognize your rank on your shoulder-straps, I beg you to submit without a struggle between us, for if you will glance a few hundred feet behind me, you will see that I am by no means alone."

Major Mountjoy did as he was directed, and instantly his eyes fell upon a squadron of Confederate horsemen, and he saw that to escape was impossible.

There were half a hundred of them, not wild-looking fellows, in mixed attire, as he had fled from, but a splendid set of men, dressed in gray uniforms, cavalry boots, sable slouch hats, with plumes, armed to the teeth and riding superb jet-black horses magnificently caparisoned.

"Ha! you are an officer of the Black-Horse Rangers?" cried Major Mountjoy.

"I am their commander, sir, Dean Darrington. May I ask you your name?" was the calm response.

"I am Major Marsden Mountjoy, sir, of the United States army, and to surrender does not cut me so deeply when I know to whom it is I have to give up my sword," said Major Mountjoy, in a light-hearted, gallant way, though it was indeed a bitter blow to him to feel that he was a prisoner to the very man whom he had told Lois Delafield he would some day capture.

CHAPTER XX.

FRIENDS, YET FOES.

"MAJOR MOUNTJOY, I am sorry that the fortunes of war make you a prisoner, sir; but you were rash to come alone so far from your lines," and Dean Darrington gazed into the handsome, fearless face of the young officer whom he had captured, with real regret that it was his duty to make him a prisoner.

"You are kind, sir, in your words; but let me explain that my rashness was forced upon me, as I was flying from some of your men, who came suddenly upon us on the island some miles distant from here."

"I made a run for liberty but my companions were captured, I am sorry to say, and I am equally as unfortunate now."

"Some of your men, sir, did you say?" asked Darrington.

"Yes, sir."

"It cannot be, for I have half of my company of Black Horse with me, and the other half are in camp, where I left them some hours ago."

"I did not mean to say your Black-Horse Rangers, sir, but Confederate soldiers of another command."

"You must be mistaken again, for I have just passed along our line, and I have reason to know that there are none of our regular troops on the half-way ground between the armies."

"Ah! there you have it, in the words *regular troops*, for those who ambushed us were a wild and sorry-looking lot."

"Gayoso's guerrillas, I'll wager high," exclaimed Darrington. "They claim to be Confederate cavalry."

"In capturing you, yes; but in capturing Confederates they would have claimed to have been Federals."

"They are a bad lot, Major Mountjoy, and some day I expect I shall have to hang their chief to teach them a lesson."

"You were fortunate, sir, in escaping from their hands."

"And my friends were most unfortunate, for, had I known what the captors were, I would have remained and shared their fate, especially as there were two ladies in the party."

"That is indeed unfortunate, sir; but I will at once go on the hunt for your friends, and, if you will give me your parole not to attempt to escape, you may ride with me."

"I will gladly give my parole, Captain Darrington; but you see that there lies my poor horse, who, in saving me, lost his own life."

"I noticed your affection toward your horse, Major Mountjoy, before I approached you; but I have several led animals along, and your saddle and bridle can be placed upon one of those," and Dean Darrington called to his troopers to approach, which they did, one of them leading forward a handsome black horse, which was quickly saddled for the Union officer.

"Will you ride with me, sir?" asked Dean Darrington, as Major Mountjoy vaulted into his saddle.

"Thank you, yes, and I have a favor to ask of you, Captain Darrington."

"Anything I can do, sir, it will be my pleasure," was the answer, as the two rode away together, followed by the troopers.

"I have here a whip belonging to one of the ladies who formed our party, and which she prized most highly as the gift of a very dear friend, she told me, and I therefore would like it returned to her, as I could not care for it if sent to prison."

He held up the whip as he spoke, and Dean Darrington's face flushed as he took it in his hand and glanced at it, while he said in a low tone:

"I will return it to her, sir, with pleasure, and more, if you care to send your watch and other personal effects you may have with you, I will see that they are delivered safely with the whip, to be kept until you are exchanged from prison."

"Or escape," said the major, with a smile, adding:

"But you are very kind, and I give all into your keeping, for there are men who are wont to take from prisoners all they can get," and Major Mountjoy handed over to Dean Darrington, as they rode along, his watch, chain, a seal ring and a wallet containing some money and papers of value.

"May I ask if you are not a West Pointer, Major Mountjoy?" asked Captain Darrington.

"I am, sir, of the class of '56."

"And I, but for circumstances I could not control, would have been a graduate of the class of '59. I remember you, major, as leaving the Point about the time that I entered."

"And now we meet under different flags, alas!"

"Yes, Major Mountjoy, and bitterly I regret this cruel civil war; but as a Southerner my duty is to the South, as yours is to the North."

"Now the fortunes of war are against you, and soon it may be my turn," said Captain Darrington, sadly.

"May you fall into as good hands on our side as have I on yours, but let me give you the name and address of the lady to whom that whip belongs, and so also I will ask you to send my effects."

"Perhaps I can guess her name," archly said Darrington.

"You would be a Yankee for guessing, if not in the blue uniform, could you do so?"

"Miss Lois Delafield," said Dean Darrington, glancing at the whip.

"Ha! you have guessed it, or is the name engraved there in some place I failed to notice?"

"No, Major Mountjoy; but I recall now where I have seen you before of late."

"At West Point?"

"Yes, and elsewhere."

"Indeed?"

"You may remember that the Black-Horse Rangers made a raid through your lines during the past thirty-six hours."

"Yes, and a most daring one, too."

"I passed in my retreat the quarters of Colonel Delafield, and I then saw the ladies on the piazza, and you were with them."

"By Heaven, you are right, for I recognize your splendid seat in the saddle, though you were dust and powder-begrimed then."

"Yes, we had a hard ride of it."

"A most daring deed was it, sir, for you to make a dash through our lines as you did; but you Southerners are splendid riders and perfect cavalrymen, and certainly do dashing work in your raids."

"I fear that our dash causes our cavalry to be set down often by your side as guerrillas; but the Northern cavalry will soon learn raiding in return, and your troopers win equal favor with Confederate horsemen; but we must soon discover what has become of your friends, for yonder is the island bridge," and Dean Darrington pointed to the scene of the capture of Colonel Delafield and his party.

"You made a desperate effort to escape, sir, and few men would have attempted what you did," and Captain Darrington gazed at the swollen stream and steep bank upon the other side, and realized fully what the bold effort of the Union major had been.

"It is a pity the attempt was not successful," said Major Mountjoy, dryly.

"I certainly regret it for your sake, sir, for I take no pleasure in rendering others wretched, and as a prisoner you cannot be otherwise; but those guerrillas have gotten off with your friends, and now to follow them."

The trail of the guerrillas was then taken, and the Black-Horse Rangers swiftly followed it to the scene of the parley, after their meeting with their new captain, Antonio Dallas.

Dean Darrington had a couple of Texan scouts with him, men who had trailed the Indians for years upon the border, and they followed the tracks without difficulty, read a right the signs of Antonio Dallas joining the party, and one of them remarked:

"The man that here joined them, or the men, sir, for there is two tracks o' horses, had some influence, for he released their prisoners, as their horses takes the back track, and one o' them two went with 'em."

"Thar was some trouble ter pay, fer here are blood on the grass, and a dead man have took a tumble here."

"What can it mean?" asked Major Mountjoy.

"It means that your party have gone back to your lines, or at least in that direction, along with one of those whom the guerrilla band met here."

"Here, Buckskin, you take the trail and see if it enters the Union lines, and then return to camp, and we will follow on upon the guerrillas' track," and while Buckskin, the scout, obeyed the order given him, Captain Darrington once more pressed on after the lawless band.

After hard riding they overtook the guerrillas and Captain Darrington brought them to a sudden halt.

Lieutenant Vilas knew who it was that he had to deal with, and he was very civil, and quickly explained that they had been scouting in the neighborhood of the island, had seen Colonel Delafield and his party coming, and made them prisoners.

"With what intention?" sternly asked Captain Darrington.

"Of taking them to the general, sir."

"Do you make prisoners of ladies?"

"They were with the party, sir, and I thought the general would know best what to do with them."

"And then?"

"We met our captain and he released them, for they were old friends of his, and he took them back to their lines."

"Who is your captain?"

"Captain Gayoso."

"He is one who would quickly swing, did I command this army, for, pretending to be independent scouts, he and his band do much to cast odium upon Confederate soldiers."

"You may tell him just what I say of him, and more, that I expect some day to have to order the execution of himself and his entire gang," and Dean Darrington turned away, an angry flush upon his face, for though the guerrillas had the reputation of doing considerable service, in their lawless way, for the Confederate cause, he did not doubt but that they were equally as serviceable to the enemy, and thus made capital out of both armies.

Heading for his own camp he arrived there in the night, and Major Mountjoy was turned over as a prisoner of war, though the young captain of the Black Horse regretted exceedingly that stern duty compelled him to do so, and promising to forward into the Union lines the articles intrusted to his keeping, he shook hands warmly with the Northern officer in parting and wished him a quick exchange back into his own army.

Thus the two parted, friends, yet foes, to meet again much sooner than either anticipated, and under circumstances neither could have dreamed of.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE FATAL LOTTERY.

WHEN Dean Darrington reached his own quarters, after his parting with Major Mountjoy, he found orders awaiting him to at once visit his general.

Remounting his horse he rode to head-quarters, and upon his arrival discovered that there was considerable excitement among both officers and men.

"Ah, Darrington, I am glad to see you," cried General Morgan, as the young captain of the Black Horse Rangers entered.

"How can I serve you, general?" asked Dean Darrington, taking a seat near his chief and nodding to his brother officers who were in the tent, and upon the faces of whom rested a look of anxiety.

"I will tell you, Darrington, just what I wish you to do, and it is a painful service you will have to perform; but the fact is an example must be made at once, or no one knows just what to expect."

"The fact is, these guerrillas are getting us into trouble, or at least I suspect their acts of being the cause, for they have committed some barbarities which have been placed upon my regular cavalry, and the result is five of my soldiers were deliberately led out and executed to-day in retaliation."

"Indeed, sir?"

"Yes, it is true, for I have here a communication from General Lyon to the effect that he has not only executed five of my men, but intends to order the death penalty passed upon others, if lawless acts are permitted by me."

"But you have sanctioned no acts of lawlessness, general?"

"True, and yet your own Black-Horse Rangers are the ones accused."

"By Heaven! but the accusers shall rue this," cried Dean Darrington, with angry voice and flashing eyes.

"It is the work of the lawless horde who hang between each army, and they doubtless, in what they have done, have pretended to be Black-Horse Rangers."

"But that does not alter the fact that five of my good men and true were led out and executed, and I wish to check this by retaliation, so order you to have the Union prisoners in our possession draw lots, and five of them must be *black balls*, for that number must be sacrificed in return, and I will so report to General Lyon, that he will not again punish the innocent for the guilty," sternly said General Morgan.

"But this is awful, general, and I wish that it could be avoided," remarked Dean Darrington.

"I see no way in which it can be, captain."

"I would rather order the execution of every man of Gayoso's band."

"True, and yet they claim to be Confederates, and certainly render us good service."

"It would be better to depend upon our regular troopers alone, and to cut these lawless fellows off in their arts."

"They are good scouts, spies, and number many good men, doubtless, though into their ranks some evil fellows are enlisted who give all a bad name."

"What to do with them I do not know," said General Morgan, in a perplexed way.

"Hang them all, and trust to luck that none are innocent," almost fiercely said Dean Darrington.

"You are severe upon them, Darrington; but then I have certain knowledge regarding Gayoso and his men which I am not at liberty to make known; but the point is, painful as it is to do, I must do my duty, and you will at once obey my orders and lead out five prisoners for execution to-night."

Dean Darrington's fine face wore a troubled look, and he replied:

"I shall of course obey your orders, general, for my duty is to obey; but this war is indeed becoming bitterly cruel when such things can be."

"Have you further orders, sir?"

"No; only report when the execution has taken place, and let it be at midnight and as quiet as possible; and I only hope I will not be driven to order another such deed done," sadly said the Confederate general.

"If another execution is ordered, sir, I shall see that the guilty ones are punished," remarked Dean Darrington.

And saluting, he left the quarters of his chief, his heart full of emotion and bitterness at the duty he was called upon to perform.

Straight to the prison quarters he wended his way, riding slowly and with the air of one who seemed grieved to the soul.

Arriving there, he made known his orders to the commander of the prison, and then ordered that the "lottery of life" should be gone through with.

"You have the prisoners draw lots, Captain Ruggles, while I go to my camp for my men, for they are to be the executioners, I am sorry to say," said Dean Darrington.

"It is a great misfortune, Captain Darrington, that we are called upon to do such a painful duty; but war spares neither lives nor feelings," answered Captain Mortimer Ruggles, who was a gallant young staff officer, detached to do duty as a prison commander, a duty which he, alike with all other brave men, wholly detested.

Riding to his camp, Dean Darrington soon had his troopers out, and they took up the march for the scene of execution.

The place was reached, a firing squad was detailed and took up their stand, their carbines near, and Dean Darrington went to the prison with the escort for the doomed men.

Arriving there, Captain Ruggles informed him that the five men who had drawn the fatal black balls in the lottery of life and death, were ready.

One glance into their faces caused an exclamation to burst from the lips of Dean Darrington, while he fairly moaned:

"My God! Major Mountjoy is one of the unfortunates!"

CHAPTER XXII.

A FOE'S FRIENDSHIP.

FOR a moment did Dean Darrington stand like a statue, his face pale and stern, as he realized that the man whom he had made a prisoner but a short while before had drawn a black ball in the fatal lottery, and was to die.

He knew him only as one who had been a cadet at West Point with him, one who had that very day been the escort of Lois Delafield in her ride, and who had consented to his keeping his personal effects and the treasured riding-whip to be given to Lois's keeping.

Could he see him die, and have her know that he had been the executioner of her friend, the gallant young Union officer, who had accidentally fallen into his hands?

The thought was terrible to him, and for a minute he seemed dazed by the position in which he found himself.

Just then Major Mountjoy saw and recognized him, and bowing pleasantly said:

"My end comes quickly, Captain Dean; but I do not repine."

The face of the doomed man was white, but firm and fearless, utterly so.

He only knew that he was to be the victim of retaliation with others, and must meet his doom as became a brave man.

The words of Major Mountjoy aroused Captain Darrington to action, and turning quickly to the prison commander, he said:

"Captain Ruggles, this officer must not be included in the list of doomed."

"It cannot be otherwise, Captain Darrington, for he drew his lot with the others," was the answer.

"It must be otherwise."

"I cannot so order it, Darrington, or I would; but the lots were fairly drawn, every man in the prison taking his chance, and that officer, the first to draw, got a black ball."

"Order another drawing for a fifth man to take the place of Major Mountjoy," said Dean Darrington.

"I dare not take the responsibility, Darrington, or I would, for I like that man's appearance, and it is a shame that he should meet such a fate."

"You must take the responsibility, Ruggles."

"I cannot, Captain Darrington, it would cost me a court-martial, and doubtless a dismissal from the service."

"Then I shall take the responsibility, Ruggles, and order you to call another drawing."

"You are my superior, Captain Darrington; but I must urge that you take a great responsibility upon yourself."

"I will meet the consequences, be they what they may, so please put all upon my shoulders, and call for another drawing."

"With but one black ball?"

"Yes, in place of that officer."

"It is hard to put the poor fellows once again in suspense for their lives, and one surely to be the sufferer."

"It must be done," was the stern reply.

"As you please, Captain Darrington," and the order was given for another drawing.

The five unfortunates had seen that something was going wrong between the two officers, and were hoping against hope that they were to be spared.

Now and then Major Mountjoy's keen ears caught a word or two, and he realized that Dean Darrington was trying to save him.

As he saw that he had gained his point, he called to him and said:

"Captain Darrington, I cannot accept my life so given, sir."

"You must," was the short reply.

"I took my chances with the others, and so accept the result."

"No, you are to be spared, for I have ordered another drawing."

"And your order will get you into trouble."

"I will take the consequences willingly, as you are willing to do, Major Mountjoy."

"I must refuse my life upon terms that will put another of my comrades into my place, and perhaps bring disgrace upon you," said the gallant Union officer, and Captain Ruggles remarked, with admiration:

"By Heaven! but you are a noble man, and I am glad that Darrington has the nerve to save you."

Major Mountjoy bowed and answered:

"I refuse to accept my life, sir."

"You are a prisoner, Major Mountjoy, and cannot dictate terms," coldly said Dean Darrington, and he turned his eye down the line of prisoners, who were just then marched out for the second drawing.

They did not understand the situation, knew not how many more were to be included in the death-list, and they looked pale and anxious, though they faced their destiny unflinchingly.

A black ball was then placed with many white ones in a box, and the fatal drawing was begun.

Slowly down the line the man bearing the box passed, and into the narrow opening each prisoner thrust his hand and drew it out, glancing with a look that no artist's brush could portray, to read his fate at a glance.

A flush of the face, a sigh of relief, showed that hope came again into the heart, as the white ball in each prisoner's hand told him that he had passed the dread ordeal in safety.

Down the entire line went the man bearing the fatal box, and but one remained to draw.

All gazed upon that one, for all knew that he had left for him the black ball.

Dean Darrington had followed the man, as had also Captain Ruggles, and their eyes fell upon the face of the one who must be the fated victim.

He was a mere boy, scarcely seventeen, with large, dark blue eyes, golden hair that clustered in short curls over his head, and a form that was erect, a mien that was proud and fearless.

He whitened a little as he saw his doom, then smiled and stretched forth his hand with perfect fearlessness.

Not the tremor of a muscle was visible as his hand touched the box.

Then Dean Darrington sprung forward, grasped the outstretched hand and cried:

"Hold! boys are not included in this lottery of life!"

A murmur of disapprobation ran through the crowd of prisoners, while one rough-looking fellow said fiercely:

"Boys hain't known in the army."

"He's a soldier and got to take what comes with the rest o' us."

A chorus of voices chimed in with this sentiment, for the prisoners saw that they were to go through the third ordeal of death.

But Dean Darrington was perfectly unruffled and answered:

"This boy shall not die, I say, for he is too young to be in the army, and you men must face your fate again in his stead."

"I am sorry for you; but the boy shall not be included."

The prisoners were restless, and angry murmurs ran through their lines, while the youth stepped out and said:

"I thank you, sir; but I ask no favors, and as the black ball was generously left for me I will take it and die like a man even though I am but a boy!"

A cheer at his bold words broke from his comrades, and a revolution of feeling in his favor at once came, while one young officer called out:

"Pass along the box again, and you, youngster, step to the rear!"

"Darrington, you are taking a fearful responsibility upon yourself," hoarsely whispered Captain Mortimer Ruggles, as Dean Darrington ordered the death-box to go down the line again.

"I am willing to accept the result, Ruggles," was the cool reply.

"Will you make a report to the general, or shall I?"

"I will do so," and Dean Darrington watched the box again go down the line.

But it had not advanced far before the fearful ordeal ended, for all but one.

That one was a stern-faced man of forty, who had a far-away look in his eyes, and accepted his fate with even indifference.

"My man, I am sorry for you, and I regret that I am not allowed to remain in the place you now occupy, for, though I have no desire to die, my duty as a soldier causes me to wish to suffer death rather than escape what my comrades have to face," and Major Mountjoy spoke with an earnestness of word and look that showed he meant all that he said.

"Let it be as it is, sir, for I am content to go, as life holds no joys for me, and I was about to offer myself in the boy's stead when another drawing was ordered."

"I am satisfied, sir," was the cool response of the doomed man, and he stepped to the front and ranged himself alongside of his four fellow-unfortunates, while his comrades gave him a cheer for his pluck.

To quickly end the painful scene, Dean Darrington placed the five condemned men in line, the guards took their stands about them, and they moved off to the slow beat of muffled drums, while sad farewells followed from their imprisoned comrades.

Out into the darkness they marched, four men leading the way carrying lanterns, others following with spades and shovels, then the drummers, next Dean Darrington, accompanied by several officers, and behind him the guard with the men whom a cruel fate were forcing into their graves.

The execution squad, with carbines reversed, followed, and then came a number of the Black Horse Rangers, and detachments from other commands.

Down into a vale, a "valley of the shadow of death," they filed, the lanterns causing the shadows of the trees to dance upon their flanks like giant black specters, the muffled drums breathing forth a doleful sound that echoed in every heart, and the tread of the soldiers seeming as ominous as the falling of clods upon a coffin.

"Halt!"

The word came from the lips of Dean Darrington, and the little execution squadron came to a standstill.

Then the men with the lanterns sought a spot near by, and those who bore the spades and shovels began to dig one large grave.

A silence rested upon all, broken only by the click of the spades, and the time, though but moments, seemed hours, to all but those five doomed men, and to them time flew upon lightning wings.

"All ready, sir!" said a young officer, coming forward and addressing Dean Darrington, who started, as though recalled to himself from thoughts that had been far away.

"All right, sir, place the men in line, and let the execution squad take up their position."

These orders were quickly obeyed, and then Dean Darrington stepped in front of the five Union soldiers, who stood silent, stern and fearless, the light from the four lanterns falling full upon them.

"Men, from my heart I feel for you, and I would that it were not my duty to order your execution."

"But war is cruel and merciless, and one of your commanders having ordered the execution of five Confederate soldiers without cause, the law of retaliation, to prevent another such an occurrence, demands five lives in return, and you are to be sacrificed."

"Brave men you are, and you command the admiration of your foes."

"Now the moment of your execution has arrived, and may Heaven have mercy upon you!"

"Amen!" came in solemn tones from a number of the Confederate soldiers, and the silence of death followed, and all looked like statues, so still did they stand, awaiting the next order to fall from the lips of Dean Darrington, and which one and all knew would be a death-knell.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BRAVING THE CONSEQUENCES.

"My God! this is the most painful duty of my life, to order the execution of these brave fellows. Were they spies, or deserters from our side, or did they belong to the band of Gayoso, the Guerrilla, it would be far different; but they are innocent of wrong-doing, and cruel justice demands their lives of them by the law of retaliation."

So spoke Dean Darrington to Captain Mortimer Ruggles, who stood by his side, facing the five men who had been doomed to die by the war rule of retaliation.

"It is indeed a painful duty, Captain Darrington, and I would that it were over with, for those men are as brave as lions," answered Captain Ruggles.

"It soon shall be."

"Ready there!" called out Dean Darrington, and the execution squad moved into position.

"Attention, platoon!"

The men stood at an attention, and then followed the terse, stern orders that brought the carbines to their shoulders, and next the volley of death.

With the roar of the carbines the five victims of cruel military justice fell dead, and leaving his lieutenant to attend to the burial of the bodies and march his troopers back to camp, Dean Darrington vaulted into his saddle and dashed away at a swift gallop.

To the sentinels halting him he gave the correct countersign, and soon dismounted in front of the general's head-quarters.

He found the general still up, discussing, with a number of superior officers, an intended move against the Union lines.

"Ah, Captain Darrington, you are welcome, for your advice is needed here on some points; but you look pale and anxious, and I hope nothing has occurred to—"

"Yes, general, I have just executed the most painful duty of my life, and pray Heaven I may never be called upon to order any man's death again, except in din of battle."

"I have to report, sir, the execution of the five victims who were selected to die in retaliation for our men executed by the Federals."

"Ah! that unpleasant work is over then?" said the general, with a sigh.

"It is, sir."

"I hope it will not be forced upon us to repeat it, Captain Darrington; but I have to thank you for your services in the matter, which I know, to one of your nature, were given with reluctance, though executed with military promptness, I am well aware."

"I thank you, general; but I desire also to say that I took upon myself to do that which may offend you and lose me my rank; but I acted from a sense of justice, and having assumed all responsibility in the matter, am ready to accept all consequences."

General Morgan and those present gazed into the handsome face of Dean Darrington with surprise, mingled with admiration, while the general said, in a low tone:

"My dear sir, what can you have done that wasso wrong?"

"I went, general, as ordered, to the prison, and had the prisoners draw lots for life and death."

"One of the prisoners who drew a black ball was Major Mountjoy, one of the bravest of men, and a gentleman who has been the persistent foe of my rangers, but whom I captured to-day by a mere accident."

"He was a West Pointer, graduating about the same time I entered, and my sympathy for him was such that I determined he should not end his gallant life as a victim of war's retaliation, so I ordered another drawing for a man in his place."

"Indeed? you did take a great responsibility upon yourself, sir," said the general, coldly.

"I knew all that I was doing, General Morgan, and, as I said, I am ready to abide the consequences."

"To his honor be it said, that Major Mountjoy refused to accept his life at the sacrifice of a fellow-prisoner; but I ordered another drawing, and this time the victim was a mere boy, a handsome young fellow, whom Captain Ruggles says has been the idol of his comrades."

"I would not allow the boy to die, so I again ordered a drawing for a man in his place, and it resulted in a brave fellow getting the black ball, who seemed rather to wish to die than live."

"Those five men, General Morgan, I marched out and executed as you ordered, sir, and I have come to make my report and tender you my sword, if you demand it."

A deep silence fell upon all, as Dean Darrington drew his sword, took it by the blade and extended the hilt toward his commander.

He knew well what he had done, in thus defying military law, and was ready to accept all consequences.

A moment, and one of awful suspense, General Morgan stood gazing at the daring officer. Then he spoke, and in a low, earnest tone:

"Captain Darrington, you have indeed stepped outside the bounds of military discipline, in what you have done, while you have placed prisoners twice in jeopardy of their lives, and your conduct merits a severe reprimand."

"But, in so much as your actions were sins of the heart and not of the head, and taking into consideration your valuable services at all times since you have been under my command, I take upon myself the responsibility of not ordering you under arrest for trial by court-martial, and pardon your offense, with the hope that you will not again assume such authority."

"General Morgan, I thank you, sir," said Dean Darrington, warmly, and those present gave a murmur of assent of the general's act, for the young captain was most popular with all who knew him.

"Now, General Morgan, it is my desire to start upon a raid into the Union lines, as I have information from my scouts that I hope will enable me to do good service," said Dean Darrington, taking the seat toward which General Morgan motioned him.

"The very thing, sir, I intended to ask you to do, as I believe, by one of your dashing raids, you can get at the entire strength of the enemy, and just where his heaviest forces are."

"I will start within the hour, sir."

"And how many men do you wish?"

"Only my own Black-Horse Rangers, sir; though I would have you order to certain points which I will give you the locality of, a few hundred men to act as a cover, should I be hotly pressed, as you know I will have a desperate ride of it."

"Designate the places you wish the supports, Captain Darrington, and I will order the troops there at once."

In a few words Dean Darrington gave the points, at any of which he might be forced to retreat from the enemy's lines, and where he wished supports to protect him, as he hoped to be able to bring back with him a captured wagon train, stores and horses.

With a grasp of the general's hand and a

salute to the others present, the dashing leader of the Black-Horse Rangers left head-quarters, and mounting his horse, rode at a rapid gallop to his own camp.

As he arrived there he found awaiting him Antonio Dallas, dressed in the uniform of a Confederate captain of cavalry.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE RAID OF THE BLACK-HORSE RANGERS.

"Ah, Captain Darrington, I am glad to see you."

"This is a late hour to make a call, but then I have information of importance for you," and Antonio Dallas held forth his hand, which Dean Darrington grasped coldly, while he said:

"I fear that if you rely upon Gayoso's guerrillas for your information, Dallas, it is not trustworthy."

"It is in this case, and I must confess that I do rely upon the guerrillas for news, for, as you know, they are the tools I have to carry on the secret service duties I have undertaken for General Morgan."

"How can I serve you, Dallas?" asked Dean Darrington, as though anxious to bring the interview to a termination.

"I wish you would make a raid into the Union lines with me, for I can show you just where the quartermaster and commissary camps of the enemy are located."

"Indeed! this is valuable information, Dallas, but another duty I am ordered on just now will prevent my going under your guidance; but another time I may be more fortunate, or unfortunate, as the case may be."

Antonio Dallas saw that Dean Darrington was inclined to be sarcastic; but he did not say anything to resent it, while he asked, quietly:

"Can you not postpone the other duty, Captain Darrington?"

"No, for it is urgent."

"A move to the front, I suppose?" was the indifferent query.

"A move to the rear," was the significant reply of the Black-Horse Ranger, who had in his mind the rear of the enemy's lines.

"Ah! does General Morgan intend to fall back?"

"Oh, no, I only have to perform a little duty, and as I must call my men to saddle now, I know you will excuse me if I run off, and make yourself comfortable in my quarters, for Anchor will look after you."

"You do not wish me to accompany you, then?"

"Well, it is a special duty, Dallas, and I am hardly at liberty to ask you; but after breakfast in the morning, ride over to the general's head-quarters, tell him of your information, and if he wishes me to attempt the capture of the trains upon my return, I will gladly do all in my power."

"Now, there is a bed for you, that canteen yonder has brandy in it, cigars are in yonder box, and you can make yourself at home."

"Good-night," and Dean Darrington left his quarters, equipped for his ride.

He had already given orders for his troop to quietly get ready, and he found them standing by their horses as he approached the camp.

"Mount, men!" he said, in a low tone, and in silence they obeyed.

Away from the camp he led them, taking a road leading to the rear of the Confederate army.

Leaving the quarters, soon after Dean Darrington did, Antonio Dallas skulked among the trees until he saw the troop ride off, and then he muttered:

"Good! he is going to the rear of his own lines, when I half believed he was bound on a raid into the Union camps."

"Well, another time I will lead him into a trap, and there is time enough."

"Now to return and accept the hospitality of the man I hate," and he returned to the quarters of Dean Darrington, was admitted by Anchor, and, after a glass of brandy and a few puffs at a cigar, threw himself down to rest.

In the mean time Dean Darrington, feeling assured that Dallas was watching him, had led him off the scent by taking the road he did.

A mile from the camp he turned out of the beaten path, and going across fields and through timber made a wide circuit, striking the Union lines just before dawn, and dashing through the surprised pickets ere they realized that a foe was upon them.

His spies had brought him correct information of just where the camps of the commissary and quartermaster were situated, and in the early dawn the Black Horse Rangers, riding like the wind, swooped down upon their surprised enemy, and in a few moments well-loaded wagons, valuable horses, ambulances filled with medical supplies, and half a score of officers as prisoners, were hastening pell-mell toward the Confederate forces.

The Black Horse Rangers knew their work well, and executed it in such a masterly style that the retreat was well under way before there could be brought up a regiment to pursue, and then only infantry could be gotten, as the cavalry camps were miles away.

Sending more than half his force with the

captured train, Dean Darrington divided the remainder of his men into squads, with instructions to ride to the different points where the supports would be awaiting them, and make known just where the retreat would come out.

He also ordered the officer in charge of each squad to make as much show as possible that a large force of Confederates had invaded the lines, which would cause the Federals to form in battle array, and thereby enable the troopers to escape with their capture.

Taking fourteen men with him, and picking them, not only for their well-known pluck, but also for the worth of their horses on a hard ride, Dean Darrington dashed still further toward the rear of the Federal army, determined to play some desperate game.

Stern and silent he led them on, avoiding here and there a camp, and dashing along at a sweeping gallop.

Ere he was more than discovered he had flitted away, and the camps that were aroused by his coming rallied quickly into line of battle, confident that it was but the advance of a large force of Confederates.

The consternation that a small force of cavalry can cause in an army of thousands is well known to all soldiers, and this very paucity of numbers gave them strength, while, with his plans all formed, a map in hand of the camp of his enemy, and knowing just what to do, Dean Darrington held the Federals at a disadvantage, though he had but a handful of men with him.

A halt on a wooded hillside to rest and water the horses lasted for half an hour, and Dean Darrington smiled grimly as he saw that he was not followed, the Union soldiers having pressed to the front and not the rear.

From an eminence, with his powerful glass, he saw the Federal line and knew that though his chances were desperate, there was still a possibility of his success.

After a rest he again sprung into his saddle, and followed by his men dashed on once more.

Here a drove of cavalry horses was struck en route to the camps, and but half a dozen drovers to guard them.

A dash into their midst, a few shots, to put the drivers to flight, and the drove was turned about and headed down a dusty road, on the circuit around the army.

Pell-mell they went, passing a piece of artillery here going to the front, a platoon of infantry there, then a small supply train, and next a hospital-camp.

Before any one knew just what it all meant the couple of hundred horses with their Confederate captors dashed by, and the flight was continued.

Thus it went on for miles, until Dean Darrington knew that he could carry his drove no further, and so brought them to a halt.

Those of his troopers' horses who were feeling the hard ride, were exchanged for the fresher animals of the drove, and after another rest of half an hour in a dense thicket, the small band of raiders moved on.

The whole army was now aroused, but their gaze was toward the front, expecting a general advance of the Confederates, and only the scattered camps in the rear knew that raiders were in their midst.

And then, acting under orders, and hardly knowing which way to look for the bold riders, found they had slipped through their clutches before they were hardly aware of their presence.

Three-fourths of the circuit had now been made, and Dean Darrington drew his men up in a copse of timber for the final dash.

Along the lines in front the firing of artillery and musketry was heard, showing that both armies were on the *qui vive*.

Following upon his track Dean Darrington knew that there must be quite a force of Federal cavalry, but just how far in the rear he could not tell.

Before him lay a mile or more of Federal camps, a pack of artillery here, an infantry regiment there, with a squadron of cavalry scattered along the line.

To reach his own army he knew that he must pass through these camps, and his map showed him where he might expect to find cavalry, and these he wished to avoid at all hazards, for Union horsemen would give him a hot chase did they once get near him, and the chances were that they would capture his entire party.

"I must go by Colonel Delafield's head-quarters," he muttered, as he was preparing to move on once more.

"Do you think we can reach our lines, sir?" asked an under officer.

"Oh, yes, for our horses are by no means used up, and by avoiding the cavalry camps we can dash through," was the indifferent reply.

But Dean Darrington was far from feeling indifference, for his motives in making the raid were to see Lois Delafield face to face, have a short conversation with her, and hand over to her the articles intrusted to his keeping by Major Mountjoy.

Of course he desired to make a valuable capture for the Confederates, and had done his duty in this respect first, well knowing the need his comrades had for supplies of all kinds, but when

he divided his force after the capture, to enable the train to escape into his lines, he also had in view the object of making the desperate circuit of the enemy's camps, and seeing Lois Delafield.

A couple of miles from where he then was, he knew Colonel Delafield had his head-quarters, and then it was half a league to safety beyond that; but a fearful gantlet to run to reach it.

Mounting their horses at the low command of their young leader, who again placed himself in their front, the little band of Black-Horse Rangers again dashed forward.

"This is the road we came out on before, sir," said the same officer, as they came to a fork of the road, and he recognized familiar features, which he had seen upon the raid, which the reader will remember, the Rangers passed the quarters of Colonel Delafield.

"Yes," said Dean Darrington, shortly.

"Yonder are the head-quarters which we passed, sir," said the officer.

"True, and we must dash by them."

"If the body-guard of the general is there it will be hot for us, Captain Darrington."

"True; but we must take our chances," and the young leader of the Rangers loosened his revolvers in their holsters, settled himself well in his saddle, and urged his horse forward at a run.

The Rangers followed close, in a compact mass, silent, stern-faced and ready to face the worst.

Another moment and the house was in full view, and only a sentinel or two in sight.

A couple of horses were hitched to the rack near by, and upon the piazza were half a dozen persons, two of whom were ladies, three officers and a sentinel.

"Now is my time, for I shall ride up and ask one moment of Lois, give her the whip and Mountjoy's things, and then ride for dear life.

"She will see that I am doing my duty for the South, though my love is in the North, and I think my raid will win her admiration, when she sees what a handful of gallant fellows I have, and learns just what my Black-Horse Rangers have done since dawn."

It was pardonable in the brave young officer to wish to win the admiration of his lady-love, though his daring deed was against her own side.

He now recognized her upon the piazza, and straight for the house the troopers rode like the very wind.

In the dust that swept along with them, they were supposed to be a squad of Union cavalry by those upon the piazza, and all looked up hastily at their mad way of riding, expecting startling news, for already along the entire line had the tidings spread that the Confederates had dashed through the Union camps in heavy force, and on the right wing of the army were doing great damage.

Lois Delafield and Grace Mortimer were standing side by side, and conversing with them were two officers of the colonel's staff, while the sentinel paced to and fro near.

The eyes of all were now upon the approaching horsemen, when suddenly one of the officers cried, in a ringing voice:

"Rebels! by the gods of war! Ho, sentinel, fire off your musket and give the alarm to yonder infantry regiment lying in the woods," and the officer pointed to where a number of blue-coats were bivouacking in some timber a hundred yards distant, and which, from their position, the Black-Horse Rangers had not yet seen.

The sentinel's shot was answered by the long roll of the drum from the regiment in the woods, and stern orders from the officers, and this caused their presence to become known to Dean Darrington.

At once he recognized the desperate situation he was in.

But still, straight for the house he rode like the wind, and close upon him came his dashing troopers, while Lois Delafield, with one glance at his tall form recognized him, and cried in a voice that quivered with emotion:

"Oh, Grace! it is Dean Darrington! and he will be killed!"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE RANGER'S MAD RIDE.

GRACE MORTIMER started, as the words broke from the lips of Lois Delafield, telling her that the coming troopers were not Union soldiers, but Confederates, and that the daring young Southerner had boldly made this dash into their midst.

She too now recognized Dean Darrington, and she saw by the manner that he pressed toward the house, against all odds, that he had some motive for it.

"Perhaps," she thought, "he sees that resistance is useless, and is determined to be taken before the very eyes of Lois."

The situation of the Black-Horse Rangers was indeed a desperate one, for the alarm had been given, orderlies and servants were hastening toward the house, and the infantry regiment was coming at a double-quick to head the riders off and surround them.

The commander of the regiment dared not give the order to fire, for fear of wounding some

of those on the piazza, and so urged his men on at a greater pace, for he knew well who the raiders were, recognizing the black horses and the uniform of the "Rebel Rangers," as Dean Darrington's troop was called by their foes.

Straight toward the house the young leader rode, his intention being to dash up to the piazza, dismount, and in a word tell Lois of the capture of Major Mountjoy, and give into her keeping the things he had in his charge, that belonged to the officer, along with Lois's whip.

He had unloosened the package from the straps at the back of the saddle, and held it, with the whip in his hand.

But Dean Darrington now realized that to leave the main road, and to dash up to the house, would be certain capture, or death, to all of his party.

He knew that the men behind him would follow him to death; but he felt that he had no right to force a greater risk upon them than they were then undergoing, and so he reluctantly determined to ride on.

Replacing the whip in his bootleg, and the bundle behind his saddle, he raised his hat, with its drooping sable plume, bent low, as a salute to Lois, and swept on down the highway like the wind.

Lois gave a sigh of relief as she saw his act, and then it came before her with lightning suddenness:

"He cannot escape, and would to Heaven he had surrendered here, that I might protect him."

As she spoke the regiment of infantry was halted, their guns were brought to an aim, and then came the command:

"Fire!"

A scattering fire followed, for the men were flurried with their run, and the bullets went flying after the Rangers.

Here a horse fell, there another leaped forward as a bullet struck him, and several of the Rangers were slightly wounded.

Fortunately there were half a dozen led horses along, and the trooper who had lost his steed at once sprung upon the bare back of a riderless animal, and the flight was kept on without a halt.

A few hundred feet under a desultory fire, and the Black-Horse Rangers dashed into the heavy timber.

As they disappeared Dean Darrington turned in his saddle, drew rein and bent low in a farewell to Lois, his act being counted by the Union soldiers as a defiance, for they knew not for whom it was intended.

Quickly came the flutter of a handkerchief in response, held in the hand of Lois Delafield, and seeing it, the young Ranger felt that his bold invasion of the Union lines was at least forgiven.

"Now, men, it is a hard ride for life; but I believe we can make it," he said, settling himself wholly down to engineering the escape of himself and his men from their dread danger.

A cheer was the answer as they sped along, and then came the words:

"Keep well together, and have your revolvers and sabers ready for use, for you will need them."

The men looked as if they knew just what to expect, and would meet the alternative, and at the same hot pace they kept on.

Signal guns were now heard along the line, the drums were sounding the long roll, and it was very evident that the Northern soldiers were on the alert, and if the Rangers escaped, it would be by the merest chance in the world.

A dash of a mile, and without seeing an enemy, brought the Rangers to a small stream.

Here Dean Darrington called a halt, the men dismounted, the horses were watered, girths tightened, weapons looked to, and after a rest of several minutes they were again in the saddle.

"Now, come on," was the grim command of Captain Darrington, as he again placed himself in the lead.

The short rest had greatly refreshed the horses, and the slight wounds received by several of the Rangers had been hastily dressed, so that both men and beasts felt in better trim for the work before them.

Suddenly the troop dashed upon a bivouac of cavalry, a score in number.

The men were cooking their evening meal, and their horses were staked out some distance from them, saddled, but with bridles hanging upon the saddle-horns.

At a glance the quick eyes of Dean Darrington took in the situation.

Here was a party of Northern cavalry fully a match for him, and with them in pursuit escape was certainly hopeless.

Upon the backs of the saddles were strapped the overcoats of the troopers, and these the young Ranger leader coveted and was determined to have.

As they were, around their camp-fires, some distance from their horses, and unsuspecting a raid of Southerners into their very midst, the Union cavalry were caught at a great disadvantage; but let them rally, mount and start in chase, and the Black-Horse Rangers would have the tables turned upon them.

"Men, ride for those horses, and every one of you cut an overcoat from the saddles!"

"If any man knows his horse to be failing, let

him exchange him for one of those fresh animals.

"Fire! charge!"

So spoke Dean Darrington, and pell-mell they went through the bivouac of Union cavalry, taking them by surprise, and reaching the horses before they were even fired upon.

There they halted for an instant, several exchanges of horses were made with great haste, and in each instance a black animal was selected, and every Ranger cut an overcoat from the saddle-straps.

Rallying quickly the Union cavalry ran toward them, firing with their revolvers, and one Ranger fell dead, several more were wounded, and a horse or two dropped in his tracks.

"Come on!"

The order came sternly from the lips of Dean Darrington, and like the very wind they sped along, again seeking shelter in the timber.

"Throw those overcoats about your shoulders, men!" ordered the Ranger leader, and it was promptly obeyed, Captain Darrington also hiding his gray uniform under the Northern blue.

"Men, now is our chance, and it is our only one."

"The line is yonder, and if we break through it we are safe; if not, it is death or captivity, and a few minutes more will make known our fate."

"Come!"

The spurs sunk deep, and the tired horses were urged on still more rapidly, until a few hundred yards brought them in view of the line of battle.

Breastworks had been thrown up for miles along the line, here and there a battery was stationed, in the rear of the fortifications were the camps of the Union soldiers, and it certainly was a desperate gantlet to run.

Alarmed by the signals that had been sent out all day, the Union soldiers had taken up positions along the works and were in line of battle.

Upon either wing, miles from the point where the turn of the Rangers at Colonel Delafield's head-quarters had brought them, they were expecting an attack, while there in the center, though all was in readiness for a fight, there reigned quietude.

Rumors had passed along the line that General Morgan and his entire command was raiding in the rear of the Union camps, and the infantry were leaving his capture to the cavalry, which was then searching for the hated raider.

But when the Black Horse Rangers, a mere handful of men, came dashing through their camp, and heading for the works, not a Union soldier suspected them to be other than their own troopers.

Some supposed it to be a general officer and his staff, a body-guard, and sentinels actually saluted Dean Darrington as he dashed by.

Straight to a point, where a light battery was stationed, rode the Black-Horse Rangers, for Dean Darrington knew that there was the weakest part of the line, as he had been informed by his spies.

"There is an opening in the works there, and once we get through, before they can bring their guns to bear on us we will be over the brow of yonder hill."

"They do not yet suspect us, and we are in good luck," said Dean Darrington, hastily to the young Ranger who rode closest to him.

The Union soldiers eyed them as they came on, wondered at their rapid riding, stood aside to give them passageway, and then, as they dashed out of an opening in the lines, for the first time realized that they were calmly looking on while a foe was escaping.

At the same moment a squadron of Federal cavalry appeared in hot pursuit, dashing out of the timber, and a trumpet voice shouted:

"Fire on those rebel raiders!"

"They are the Black-Horse Rangers!"

Men sprung to their guns in wild excitement, cries of alarm were heard upon all sides, and then a piece of artillery pealed forth, and a shell went flying after the Rangers.

But the fugitives were driving spurs deep now and striving to reach the brow of the hill.

Here was a small outpost, some forty men as an advance guard, with a brass six-pounder, and these rallied quickly, and turned toward the Rangers dashing upon them.

"Hold, men! do not fire upon your friends!" shouted Dean Darrington, in a voice that reached the ears of all in the outpost, and they hesitated, recognizing their own uniform, and hardly willing to believe that so small a party could be foes.

That moment of hesitation saved the Rangers, for in the next instant the Black-Horse Raiders were in their midst, a few shots were fired, steel met steel for a second, a temporary halt was made, the little piece of artillery was thrown over, and Dean Darrington and his band passed on, though several of their comrades were left dead and dying behind them.

"We are safe!" was the stern remark of the young captain, as they dashed into a brook halfway across the small valley opposite that part of the line, and a cheer broke from the gallant band.

But as they cheered the thunder of artillery reverberated along the line, and shells went

shrieking over their heads and about them, while the pursuing cavalry came riding like the wind in hot chase.

Across the brook they struggled, up the steep hillside, their horses white with foam and panting painfully, and at last the other side of the valley was reached.

"Men, that cavalry squadron is well mounted and comes on well, so we may have to fight them if any of our supports have failed to reach the points I asked the general to send them to," and Dean Darrington for the first time wore an anxious look as he saw that the Union troopers were swiftly gaining upon him.

But suddenly a cheer came in their front, the wild "Rebel yell," and in the edge of a wood was seen a long line of horsemen, several hundred in number, and they were clad in the gray uniform.

A cheer broke from the Rangers at sight of them, and several of their steeds neighed with delight, for their instinct told them that the long and fierce flight was over.

"Hello, Darrington! you have made the most gallant ride ever recorded.

"Dash on to my rear and I will protect you!" cried a young and handsome major of cavalry, riding forward far ahead of his men, and grasping the hand of the Ranger captain.

"Thank you, Major King, I will accept your kind offer with gratitude," was the reply of Dean Darrington, and as he spoke a shell came shrieking toward them, and striking Major King fairly in the breast, tore him from his horse and sped on in its cruel flight.

"My God! how strange is fate, for what have I not escaped, and that brave man slain at the first fire," said Dean Darrington, and he sprung to the ground and, aided by several of his men, bore the body of the dead officer away.

Seeing their leader fall, the cavalry dashed at a charge from the timber, and the Federal troopers coming over the brow of the hill, a fierce fight was begun, the batteries on the Union works firing hotly, so hotly, in fact, that the Confederates were forced to retreat at a rapid pace; but they had checked the pursuit after the Black-Horse Rangers, which would have ended in their capture, and so fell sullenly back before their foes into their own lines.

As Dean Darrington rode up to the general's head-quarters, an officer stepped up to him, and said:

"Captain Darrington, I regret the duty I have to perform, sir; but I am ordered to arrest you."

Dean Darrington started, but calming himself with an effort, he asked, sternly:

"I submit to arrest, sir; but of what am I accused?"

"Of being a Union spy!" was the low response of the officer.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A TERRIBLE ACCUSATION.

"ARRESTED as a spy!"

It was a terrible thing for Dean Darrington to hear and to feel.

A man who knew how true he was to the gray, true as steel, far truer than he had been to his love, for he had given her up to serve under the "stars and bars," to be accused of being a spy, was something that nearly broke his proud spirit.

Had it not been for his own innocence at heart, the bitter blow would have crushed him.

While the camps of the Confederates were ringing with praise for his daring, desperate raid directly into the lines of the enemy, going to their rear and making valuable captures as he had, he returned to his quarters to find that he was accused of being a spy.

And his accuser?

He had yet to confront him, and he went under guard to the quarters of his commanding general with a heart full of bitterness and hatred for the one who had thus accused him of a crime so foul.

In the quarters of General Morgan a number of officers were gathered, all of them looking serious, for like a bombshell had the news fallen upon them that Dean Darrington was a spy.

The general had sent an order for his arrest, and they were awaiting his coming.

In their midst stood one man dressed as a Confederate captain, whom the reader will recognize as Antonio Dallas.

His face was flushed and wore a look of triumph, and he stood the ordeal of cross-examination he was under with a nerve that was remarkable.

"Captain Dallas, will you give to the gentlemen present an account of your charges against Captain Darrington, with your reason for believing him to be a spy?" said the general.

"I do not believe him to be a spy, General Morgan—I know it."

"Well, sir, I wish to hear once more, with these gentlemen as witnesses, just what charges you make, and which, I confess, are so serious and seemingly truthful that I have deemed it my duty to order Captain Darrington's arrest."

"General Morgan, I can but repeat my charges, for as you know, sir, I am in command of an independent band of scouts and spies, that

certainly render valuable service to our cause, though I perhaps should not say so."

"It is the service that you have rendered, sir, that causes me to put faith in your charges against Captain Darrington."

"Well, general, you will find that my charges are true."

"In the first place it is known to me that Captain Darrington captured Colonel Delafield, of the United States army, and along with him two ladies and several soldiers, and released them.

"The fact was he did not capture them, for they evidently met him by appointment."

"An officer with them rode away, and, for some reason, was taken by the Black-Horse Rangers, and was brought back to the prison in our lines.

"He drew a black ball, in drawing for life or death, and Captain Darrington boldly put another man in his place."

"A young Union soldier, whom I now know to have been a spy, drew also a black ball, and he too was released by Captain Dean, and more, was allowed to make his escape."

"Captain Darrington having collected a large amount of data useful to our foes, determined to place it in the hands of a Union general, and to do this planned a raid into the enemy's lines.

"Our army was dazed by his magnificent daring, and bets, a thousand to one, were taken that he would not return; but still he did so, after going entirely to the enemy's rear, capturing a train or two, and pretending to do a great amount of damage, whereas he did but little, and the foe were glad to lose a few wagons to get the information he brought them.

"He returned with the loss of hardly any of his men, and the fact was the Federal soldiers had orders not to fire upon him or check him, for the general in command knew well he was secretly his spy, and but playing a part to make himself fame in the Confederate army.

"Arriving near the head-quarters of General Delafield, the officer he had captured, and to whose daughter he is engaged, he gave into his hands the papers he had, and thence made his way back into our lines, almost unharmed.

"Such, sir, are my charges against Captain Darrington, and as two of my men belong to his command, and were with him on his raid, I can prove what I say."

"Where are those two men?" asked the general.

"They are now on their way here, sir, as I sent for them."

"Well, gentlemen, you have heard what Captain Dallas has said, and I confess that affairs look black for Dean Darrington; but he is the last man in the Confederate army whom I would have suspected of being a traitor."

"He is a West Pointer, sir, and you know how they feel toward the Government, loving it beyond their State," suggested Dallas.

"Some may feel so, Captain Dallas; but we have a number of West Point graduates in our army now, and there are but a few, very few, hailing from the South, who have sided with the North—Ah! here comes Darrington now, and we shall soon know what he has to say."

As General Morgan spoke, Antonio Dallas's face flushed to a deeper hue, then became pale; but in an instant the reckless, defiant look returned, and he fixed his eyes steadily upon Dean Darrington as he entered, guarded by a file of soldiers.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE TESTIMONY OF A FOE.

WHEN Dean Darrington entered the head-quarters of his commanding general, his form was erect, his eyes flashing, but his face was deadly pale.

In one sweeping glance he took in the situation, saw who were present, bowed to the general, inclined his head slightly to the officers whom he knew, and then fixed his gaze upon Antonio Dallas with a cold stare.

"Be seated, Captain Darrington," said the general, and Dean Darrington sunk into a chair.

"Captain Darrington," began the general, breaking a silence that was most painful, "if I wrong you, may Heaven forgive me, and I hope that I do, rather than that you may be proven guilty of charges now cast upon you, and which are the worst that could fall upon a soldier."

"What are the charges against me, sir?" came the question in an unmoved tone.

"You have but just returned from the Union lines, I believe?"

"Yes, general."

"You made a most remarkable ride of it?"

"Yes, sir, we went to the rear of our enemy, I burned several depots of supplies, captured a valuable train, which safely reached our lines, released a few prisoners, and very nearly succeeded in bringing a drove of fine horses back with me," and Dean Darrington's eyes flashed with triumph at remembrance of his dashing ride and good services rendered.

"Your losses were remarkably slight, sir?"

"Yes, general, marvelously so."

"How was it that you could do what you did with a mere handful of men?"

"General, the very paucity of our numbers was our salvation, for the enemy were looking

for a large force and preparing to meet such, while we slipped hither and thither, avoided the camps, and managed to escape in safety."

"Did you halt at none of the camps?"

"No, sir; though we made several halts for rest."

"This appears to be a straight story, Captain Darrington."

"I hope, sir, you do not doubt my word?" was the somewhat angry response.

"Captain Darrington, the charge against you makes it necessary that I should doubt you."

"And that charge, sir?"

"Is that you are a spy, in the service of the Union general," said General Morgan, in a tone of severity.

"General Morgan, there is some base treachery toward me at work here, I assure you, sir; but, pray tell me who is my accuser?"

"You deny the charge, then?"

"By Heaven, yes! and hurl that lie into the teeth of any man who dares thus accuse me!" came the ringing words.

"I hope, Captain Darrington, that you will be able to maintain your words by offering undeniable proof," said the general, sadly.

"What proof do you need, sir?"

"Am I not a Southerner, one to the manor born, one whose ancestors for generations have dwelt in the South, and was I not among the first to enter the Confederate army?"

"Have I not given freely of my wealth to the cause of the South, equipping soldiers for the army, and have I proven myself a coward in the fight?"

"My manhood, my honor, sir, cry out against a charge so vile, an assertion so base."

"I admit all that you say, Captain Darrington, but there is strong proof brought that you entered the Union lines on a pretended raid, that you might give into the hands of the Federal commander important papers, maps and information of our armies, and furthermore that you were protected by the enemy in your ride, and succeeded in delivering to Colonel Delafield the package you had with you."

"This is an infamous falsehood, General Morgan, and so I stamp it!"

And Dean Darrington's eyes blazed with fierce anger.

"Did you not capture Colonel Delafield, and others with him, within our lines, and set them free?"

"Never, sir!"

"Again, are you not engaged to the daughter of Colonel Delafield?"

"I am, sir, and I left her at the breaking out of the war, to cast my sword with the South."

"And you did not capture her, or rather meet her father, and others with him, within our lines?"

"No, sir; but Colonel Delafield was within our lines, and with him Major Mountjoy, whom I captured, and afterward saved from death."

"The colonel and his party were captured by what are known as Gayoso's Guerrillas, and which band of cut-throats I believe are now led by yonder man," and Dean Darrington pointed to Antonio Dallas.

"These guerrillas," he continued, "took a ransom from Colonel Delafield and allowed him to return with his party to his own lines, as I understand it, and Antonio Dallas there can doubtless tell you that much, if so he will."

"This is strange indeed; but did you not see Colonel Delafield while on this raid?"

"I did not, sir."

"Nor Miss Delafield?"

"I did, sir."

"Ah!" said Antonio Dallas. "When and where did you see her?"

"In cutting our way out, I came by the head-quarters of Colonel Delafield, and I saw upon the piazza Miss Delafield, a lady friend of hers, and several United States officers."

"And did not speak with her?"

"No, sir, not more than to raise my hat."

"Nor hand her the papers it is said you carried with you?"

"General Morgan, were I so base as to be a spy, I know Miss Delafield too well to permit her to suspect me of being such, and yet hope to retain her esteem."

General Morgan turned to Captain Dallas, and said:

"Where are the two men, sir?"

"They are without, general," was the reply, and a moment after two men in the uniform of the Black-Horse Rangers entered.

They seemed pale and nervous, and avoided the eyes of their captain.

"You know these men, Captain Darrington?"

"I know them, sir, as two of half a dozen recruits I allowed to join my command, sir."

"They were with you upon the raid into the Union lines?"

"They were, sir; but they are not of the force I brought with me first into the service, and I was sorry I had to accept as recruits other than men from my own State and community."

"My men, you were with Captain Darrington upon his raid?"

"Yes, sir," they answered in chorus.

"One of you tell me what took place?"

"He dashed into a part of the line where there were few Union troops, sir, and followed

a trail all along which was marked out upon a piece of paper that had at the head in print

"HEAD QUARTERS U. S. A."

but which he tore up before coming into our lines again."

"You are mistaken, my man, it was another paper that I tore up, for I have the map here to which you refer, only it has

"HEAD QUARTERS C. S. A."

instead of U. S. A. upon it—see, General Morgan, it is the map I showed you," and Dean Darrington handed over the paper.

"Yes, it is the same," and General Morgan glanced at the man who had spoken, while he said:

"Did Captain Darrington speak with any Union officers on the ride?"

"At the head-quarters of Colonel Delafield he halted and gave to a young lady a package of papers, telling her they were of vast value."

"This you deny, Darrington?"

"Most emphatically, sir."

"And you, my man, what say you?" and General Morgan turned to the other man.

"My comrade tells the truth, sir."

"General Morgan, as you doubt my word, ask the rest of my men who were with me, for my command followed me here and wait outside."

"I will do so," and the general sent out and had half-a-score of the Black-Horse Rangers enter.

Their faces were black with anger, and one after the other pronounced the assertion of the two recruits as utterly false.

"There is something strange in all this," General Morgan said, in a quandary.

"General Morgan, if I had papers with me when I entered the Union lines, as I did not give them up, I must have them now, and the fact is, I have an important package, and you shall know its history."

"When I captured Major Mountjoy he had in his hand a whip which I recognized as having given to Miss Delafield a long time before, and knowing that he was acquainted with her, and having known him at West Point, though slightly, I felt an interest in him, and offered to return his valuables and the whip to his Union friends."

"He gave me some important papers, his purse, watch, chain, a seal ring and the whip, and I determined to give them to Miss Delafield, and to do so during my raid."

"Arriving near the head-quarters of Colonel Delafield, I found an infantry regiment encamped there, and we were driven off in hot haste, so I failed to deliver the package, and have it here with the whip."

He drew from his boot-leg the whip and took from an inner pocket the package, handing both to the general, who said to an orderly:

"Have Major Mountjoy brought here."

As the orderly departed Antonio Dallas also left the quarters, and returned just before the guard entered with Major Mountjoy.

The Union officer looked around with surprise, saluted General Morgan, bowed to Dean Darrington, and took the seat assigned to him.

"Major Mountjoy, will you kindly give an account of your meeting with Captain Darrington, for much depends upon your testimony?" said General Morgan.

"Certainly, sir; I first met Captain Darrington as a cadet at West Point: but I was graduating then and he just entering upon his cadetship, so I knew him but slightly."

"And your next meeting?"

"He took me prisoner in his lines, my horse having fallen with me."

"Was he alone?"

"Yes, when he captured me, but his troopers were near."

"How came you in our lines?"

"I was out riding with Colonel Delafield, his daughter, a lady friend, and several soldiers as an escort, when we came to where a bridge had been destroyed, and we had to make a flank movement by way of an island."

"Upon the island we were ambushed by a party of guerrillas, and I made my escape, hoping to reach my regiment and bring them in pursuit."

"My horse was wounded, I was pursued, and I had to enter your lines."

"Did you give into Captain Darrington's hands anything of value?"

"I did, sir; a whip belonging to Miss Delafield, my watch, chain, ring, purse and some papers which I supposed might be taken from me as a prisoner."

"Are these the things?"

"They are, sir."

"Major Mountjoy, Captain Darrington has been accused of being a spy, and I am glad to get your testimony, for it convinces me that there is a conspiracy against him, as I had hoped there was, rather than that he was guilty."

"A spy, sir?"

And Major Mountjoy looked indignant.

"Such was the accusation against him."

"By Heaven! but this is infamous, for Darrington and his Black-Horse Rangers are more dreaded by our men than is the rest of your army, General Morgan," was the blunt reply of the Union officer.

"One minute, general, and I hope you will allow me to deal with these two men as they deserve, for I have just learned that they are guilty of a conspiracy against Captain Darrington, acting under the pay of a person whom I do not yet know," and Antonio Dallas stepped forward.

"What is this, sir?" sternly said the general.

"I have just learned reliably, though unable now to give my authority, that these two men joined the Black-Horse Rangers for the purpose of either killing or dishonoring Captain Darrington."

"Permit me to take them in charge, general, and I will get at the bottom of the facts, when they, and whoever else may be guilty in the matter, shall be punished."

"I trust you will, sir, for this matter is most serious, and has cast a reflection upon Captain Darrington, whom I now release with the hope that he, too, will sift this charge to the dregs, and find out just where the venom of it lies."

"Thank you, General Morgan, I shall certainly do so," was the calm reply, and bowing low, Dean Darrington took the package and whip and hastily left the quarters, followed more slowly by Antonio Dallas with the two men in custody, who had made the bold charge against the gallant young Black-Horse Ranger of being a Union spy.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BROUGHT TO TERMS.

UPON departing from the head-quarters, Antonio Dallas carried with him the two Black-Horse Rangers, accompanied by a guard of several of General Morgan's personal escort.

Arriving on the outskirts of the immediate camp, Antonio Dallas came to a halt, and giving orders to the four soldiers, acting as a guard, to securely bind the two prisoners, added:

"Now, men, I can look after these prisoners for the rest of the way, while you can return to your camp."

The men were glad to escape a long ride, so obeyed orders and the Texan rode on with his two prisoners.

Arriving at a desolate-looking spot, where the road forked, and was overhung by a foliage-clad cliff, they came to a halt.

"Men, there is but one way to save your necks from the noose, for Captain Darrington is determined to push this matter hard."

"You did your duty, obeyed my orders well, but luck was against matters turning out as I had planned and hoped."

"But I'll win yet: but I must save you, and my advice is that you take that road there, leading to the Union lines, and go over to the enemy before dawn breaks, for if you stay here you'll swing for it."

"You know my secret rendezvous, and if you get into trouble on the other side send me word, and I'll come and get you out by telling the Yankee general that you had to leave the Confederate army because you were suspected of being spies."

"Here are some greenbacks for each of you, so now be off."

While he was speaking Antonio Dallas was unbinding the ropes that secured the two men, and handing them the money, he mounted his horse, and, with a wave of his hand rode away in the darkness taking the left-hand roadway.

"Well, Dick, we've got ter git," said one of the men, the two still remaining in the road, seated upon their horses.

"Fact, we've got ter put on the blue uniform now, sure."

"And if we git capter'd we'll be shot by the rebels as deserters."

"Got ter take them chances."

"Sart'in; but the cap'n made a bad mess of it that time, and he hain't one ter gen'rally make mistakes in his own interests."

"No, he hain't; but how about the uniform we wears o' ther Black-Horse Rangers?"

"We must git to ther Union line afore day, so it won't be recognized and git us popped over."

"Yes: but how much chink did ther cap'n give yer?"

"Don't know; but the roll o' greenbacks feels big."

"So do mine, and I guesses he's been liberal: but it's too late ter grumble ef they proves to be one-dollar bills, and this hain't no abidin' place for us just now, so let us make tracks towards the Union lines."

"I'm willin', so here goes," and the two men urged their horses forward, when suddenly loud, distinct and threatening came one word:

"Halt!"

The two men drew rein instinctively, and from the lips of both broke an exclamation of mingled surprise and terror.

Had their conversation been overheard?

Was there a Confederate outpost there which they knew nothing of?

What would be the result?

Such were the thoughts that flashed through their minds, and like statues they sat upon their horses.

"Who goes there?" came the stern query.

"Friends!" faltered one of the men.

"Dismount, and advance, friend, and give the countersign," cried the voice of the one who could not be seen, but who surely barred their path.

"You go, comrade," whispered one.

"No, you go," the other replied, in a quivering voice.

"I don't know the countersign."

"You does too, for the cap'n gave it to us."

"Say we is Black-Horse Rangers on a scout."

"All right," and nerving himself to the ordeal before him, he handed his bridle-rein to his companion, and dismounting advanced toward the spot from whence the voice had come.

"Halt! stand thiere and give the countersign," and the man found the muzzle of a carbine pointing full in his face.

"Mexico!" he whispered, giving the countersign for the night, and which Antonio Dallas had made known to him.

"Countersign correct; but who are you?" demanded the sentinel, standing securely hidden in the edge of a thicket.

"We are Black-Horse Rangers."

"Ah! then our captain is here to see you, for I too am a member of the Rangers."

"Ho, captain!"

"Ay, ay," and a tall form strode forward, halting by the side of the stranger an instant, and then walking to the other, who sat in his saddle, anxiously awaiting for the return of his comrade.

"Dismount, sir! Ho, men, put these fellows in irons, for they are the ones I seek," came the command, and the voice was that of Dean Darrington.

Escape was impossible, and tremblingly the two men waited while there came out of the thicket half a dozen Black-Horse Rangers, who quickly ironed their wrists, and mounting, the party rode away, the young Ranger captain leading.

A ride of a couple of miles and they rode into the camp of the Rangers.

"Bring those men into my tent," ordered Dean Darrington, and Anchor having lighted a candle the accused officer was face to face with his accusers.

"Men, I expected that your master, Antonio Dallas, having gotten you into a scrape, would try to extricate you in some way, on account of his own safety, and I therefore lay in wait for you, and you are now my prisoners."

"That I do not intend to stand any trifling, you will understand, when I tell you that upon your answers depend your lives."

The men groaned at the stern words of the young Ranger captain, but made no reply, and Dean Darrington continued:

"Now I know that you enlisted in my command to get rid of me in some way, and that you were ordered to do so by Antonio Dallas, who doubtless was to pay you well."

"You were with me on my raid, and you know well that the charges you made against me to-night were utterly false, so I expect you to make a clean breast of it and tell me the truth."

"Beware how you tell me false, for I know more than you think I do, and I shall order you out to be shot within five minutes after you tell me a lie."

"I'll tell the truth, sir."

"Me, too," cried the men, thoroughly frightened, for they saw that Dean Darrington was in deadly earnest.

"See that you do."

"What do you wish to have me tell you, sir?" asked one.

"You are secretly members of Antonio Dallas's band?"

"Yes, sir."

"He bade you enlist in the Rangers?"

"Yes, sir."

"For what purpose?"

"He holds a grudge ag'in' you, cap'n, for some reason, and he said he intended to break you in the army or have you shot for a spy."

"Ah! and he made you enlist in my command as spies upon my actions?"

"He did, sir."

"And he told you just what to accuse me of to-night?"

"Yes, sir."

"And, finding that his charges were proven false, and that he had gotten you into a tight place, he bade you make your escape to the army of the enemy?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you were going to the Union lines when I caught you?"

"Yes, sir."

"This proves you to be deserters, and as such I shall hold you in irons for the present, for I may need you soon."

"Orderly, have these men closely confined in the guard-tent, and strip the uniform off of them which they disgrace," came the stern order of Dean Darrington, and when in his tent alone with his faithful negro, Anchor, he said:

"Anchor, this Captain Antonio Dallas is playing a deep game for love and gold, and he is determined to take my life or bring me into disgrace in some way."

"But I know his little plot, and I shall thwart him."

"To-morrow I shall remain in camp, for I aw-

very tired, as are the men; but the next day I shall visit the camp of Captain Dallas, and I wish you to accompany me."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE GUERRILLA'S WARNING.

It was the morning after the raid of the Black-Horse Rangers into the Union lines.

The scene now lies within the camps of the Federal army, and at the head-quarters of General Delafield, for that gallant officer has been promoted to the rank of a brigadier.

Along the entire line there had been but one subject of conversation, and that was the daring, almost desperate, yet withal successful raid of the dreaded Black-Horse Rangers.

Their very paucity of numbers had in the end proven their strongest ally, for, where the Union soldiers were prepared to meet a foe in force, the handful of cavalry eluded, flanked and foiled them.

Around the breakfast-table of General Delafield the "Rebel Rangers" were the subject of discussion, and surrounded by his military family, his staff, and with Lois presiding, the ears of the latter drank in with pleasure the praises of her lover from his foes.

"You know this wild rider, then, general?" said a young captain and an *aide* just attached to the staff.

"Yes, captain, I have known him for some time, and it is just such deeds as he accomplished yesterday that I would expect from him, and our sentinels must keep their eyes open, for this is his third raid into our lines."

"Well, orderly?" and General Delafield turned to his orderly, who just then stepped into the room, and saluting, stood in an attitude of waiting.

"An officer to see you, sir, on important business."

"I will come right out."

"As I have finished my breakfast, pray excuse me," and the general left the table.

Ushered into his head-quarters room General Delafield saw there an officer in the dress of a Union cavalry captain.

Turning, the visitor stood face to face with the general.

"Captain Dallas?"

"Yes, General Delafield, and I have come especially to see you."

"Permit me to offer my congratulations upon your deserved promotion, of which I have heard."

"Thank you, Captain Dallas; and I am glad to hear from the commanding general that you are doing good service for our arms, though I must confess I do not like the spying service you are in."

"We call it by a less severe name, general, for we term it the secret service," said Dallas, with a smile, yet it was evident that he felt annoyed at the criticism upon his acts by the man whose daughter he hoped to win.

"Well, it is necessary, I suppose, to have secret service men, for an army is made up of all kinds; only I think as a regular officer you could win more honor than as a spy, even though you were less valuable."

"But, have you breakfasted?"

"I have not, general, for I left the Confederate camps after midnight."

"I will have you come in and join the ladies and my staff at breakfast, for I suppose there is nothing of importance that you desire to communicate at once?"

"General Delafield, there is something of importance I desire to see you about, and after I have breakfasted I will be glad to have half an hour's talk with you."

"Certainly; but now come in, for you look fatigued."

And General Delafield led the spy into the breakfast-room.

Lois received him pleasantly, Grace bowed coldly, and when introduced to the officers of the staff, who knew him by reputation only as a secret service captain, they gazed upon him with considerable interest, for word had gone round how well he had served the Union cause.

A handsome fellow, with easy grace of manner, an attractive way of speaking, and good flow of language, Antonio Dallas ate his breakfast leisurely and at the same time greatly entertained his listeners.

After he had finished the meal he joined General Delafield in his private room, and the latter said:

"Now, Captain Dallas, what have you to communicate?"

"Something that interests you deeply, sir, and I have taken the liberty to make a move in your behalf, as I felt assured you would take my advice in the matter."

"I am more than willing to receive and follow all advice I deem good, Captain Dallas; but let me ask you first if you know whether Captain Darrington of the Confederate Black-Horse arrived in safety into his lines after his most remarkable dash through our camps?"

"Yes, sir; and with such a small loss, and with such little success that it was hinted in the Confederate lines that he was merely entering

your camps to give into your hands maps and papers of importance, he being in reality Union in his sentiments."

"By Heaven! but this is one of the basest charges ever made against an honorable man, for Dean Darrington is not one to do an act so vile."

"Had he loved the blue more than the gray, he would have donned it, and cast his fortunes with the Bonnie Blue flag; but having gone with his people, he is the last man to prove traitor to them."

General Delafield spoke warmly, and Antonio Dallas felt that he had to go carefully in speaking against Dean Darrington, so he said:

"So I said, sir, in my testimony before General Morgan, and I flatter myself that my words had a great deal of weight for Darrington."

"But it is sheer nonsense for them to say his raid was fruitless of results, for he killed and wounded more of our men in his dash, than he had troopers with him, captured one of our most valuable trains, burned innumerable stores, destroyed the bridges in our rear, and paroled three times as many prisoners as he had soldiers, while he alarmed our whole line."

"I tell you, sir, no more dashing deed has been done this war, nor will it be again."

"You are mistaken then, general, for it is to be repeated."

"Ha! Darrington is mad."

"No, sir, there is method in his madness, and it is on this account I came to speak to you."

"Well, Captain Dallas?"

"You know the course taken by Captain Darrington in his first raid?"

"Yes."

"He came by your quarters?"

"He did, sir."

"In this raid just ended he did the same?"

"True."

"His object was to come by here, general."

"And why?"

"He hoped to make a capture."

"Ah! do you mean that he hoped to make me prisoner?"

"No, general, but he hoped to be able to capture Miss Delafield."

"By the gods of war! but I cannot believe this, Dallas."

"It is true, sir, as I know."

"How do you know it, Dallas?"

"General, I have watched Captain Darrington closely, for he has been a man that bore watching, did I wish to serve the Union army."

"I noticed that his raids had a deeper motive than to serve the Confederate arms."

"He has made many dashes here and there, and, if you will recall them, they have invariably terminated in the vicinity of your head-quarters."

"The last two raids he came directly to your head-quarters, and had he not been hotly pursued by Mountjoy's cavalry on the first occasion, and headed off on the second, by the infantry regiment encamped near by, he would have made a valuable capture."

"Of my daughter, you think?"

"I know it, sir."

"But for what purpose?"

"He loves her, was engaged to her when he came South to enter the Confederate army, and trusting in her love for him, wishes to capture her in a romantic way, and make her his wife."

"But my daughter would never consent to such an act."

"Doubtless, sir, but Captain Darrington believes to the contrary, and he intends to put her to the test."

"What do you mean?"

"I know that it is his intention to make another raid, dash directly to your head-quarters and capture Miss Delafield."

"You know this, Dallas?"

"I do, sir."

"How, may I ask?"

"I have a spy in his command, and he overheard the whole plot between Captain Darrington and his lieutenant."

"This seems incredible."

"It is why I came here, general, and my advice to you is to change your head-quarters at once."

"But I must be near my command."

"You can be, for there is a plantation-house two miles from here, known as Glen Grange, and the family removed from it yesterday, leaving only the old faithful servants in charge, yet asking that a Union general might take possession as his head-quarters to protect it."

"I know Glen Grange, and a lovely place it is, but it is in rather an exposed place."

"It would be, sir, were it not protected by the river and the range of hills near by; but to reach it a raiding party would be wholly hemmed in."

"Well, I will think of it, for the place is about as convenient for me as is this one, and I should judge, far more desirable as a residence."

"It is indeed, sir, and as the place was left partially under my charge, by Mrs. Romer, when she departed, I will gladly turn it over to you as head-quarters, and you will find the servants reliable and competent, for I know what they are."

"Well, I will consider the removal thither, Dallas, and I thank you for your kindness."

"I have but done my duty, General Delafield, and I would urge that you remove at once, for no one knows just when Captain Darrington intends making his raid, and he may do so immediately."

"True, I will ride over to Glen Grange, and will be glad to have you accompany me."

"Thank you, sir, and perhaps the ladies would like to see their new abode?" suggested Dallas.

"I will ask them," and General Delafield left the room, and half an hour after a party of four rode away from the head-quarters, and a small cavalry escort followed them.

The four were General Delafield and Grace Mortimer in front, and behind them came Lois Delafield and Antonio Dallas.

Upon the face of the latter was a look of ill-concealed triumph, for he had given his warning, and matters were shaping to suit him.

CHAPTER XXX.

IN THE GUERRILLA CAMP.

AGAIN was Antonio Dallas back in the Confederate lines.

He was reclining at ease in a hammock, made of canvas, and swung between two trees in front of his own tent.

A short distance off was the camp of his followers, some two-score in number and a wild-looking set of men.

In the background were their horses, and several wagons and a couple of ambulances, with a small mountain howitzer, and a herd of extra horses completed the outfit of the strange band.

Antonio Dallas alone enjoyed the comfort of a tent, and the wagons carried the entire equipage of the men.

A negro, the same who had been the standby of Gayoso, the Guerrilla, was cooking the evening meal at a fire near by, and the savory odor was wafted to the nostrils of Antonio Dallas, as he lay in his hammock, smoking a cigar.

He was now attired in the uniform of a Confederate captain of cavalry, and though he well knew the desperate danger of the life he was leading, he did not show it in his face in the slightest, for that was as serene as an autumn sunset.

He was playing a double game, pretending to serve the Confederate cause, and with a leaning toward the Union side simply to further his own ends the better.

He had given most important information to the Confederate general, but somehow it had always been just too late to take advantage of it, though this fact was not observed by the side he pretended to serve.

He gave equally as important information to the Union general, and this was always in time to be taken good advantage of.

The Union general knew that he was pretending to serve his foes, yet serving actually the boys in blue, and the Confederate commander believed him honest in his endeavors to serve him, though he was making believe to be friendly toward the United States army.

So it was, and in double danger Antonio Dallas was passing his days until he could strike a blow in his own behalf.

From both sides he robbed alike; but when raiding the Union lines he always made believe that it was the Black-Horse Rangers.

When stealing from the Confederates, he passed his men off as Mountjoy's cavalry.

If it was a plantation home to be sacked, then some desperate gang of guerrillas were accused of the work, and thus Antonio Dallas was growing rich off of both sides, and calmly awaiting until he could accomplish his great *coup d'état* in safety, when it was his intention to seek other scenes.

Far up in the mountains he had a secret rendezvous or camp.

There he had a few faithful men as guards, and thither all his valuable booty that could readily be moved had been taken.

Leaving there some of his best horses, and having his men all ready for a rapid march, he felt that he had a reserve force to fall back on in case of need that would serve him well.

Lying in his hammock, as he puffed the smoke leisurely up into the air, he was thinking of the time when his plans would be mature, and he saw that the day was not far distant.

Suddenly the rapid fall of hoofs fell upon his ears, and a horseman appeared in sight.

"Captain Darrington, by the dogs of war!"

"Why does he come here?" muttered Dallas, and dropping his cigar he pretended to be asleep.

"Ho, my man, your master is at home, I see, so kindly awaken him," called out Dean Darrington, as he rode up to the camp-fire where the black was cooking.

"Massa awful tired, sah, and gib orders no one was to wake him up, sah," answered the negro.

"Then I shall do so."

And dismounting, Dean Darrington threw his bridle-rein to Anchor, who accompanied him, and strode toward the hammock.

"Massa must not be woked up, sah," said the

gro, springing in front of Dean Darrington in threatening manner.

"Stand aside, sir!" sternly ordered the young captain.

But the negro was determined, and conscious of his great brute strength, and being in his own camp, while he was obeying orders, though he knew his master was awake all the time, he answered:

"You must not go, sah, for I won't have massa woked up."

With a spring Dean Darrington was upon the negro, and with a herculean effort that was something remarkable, he hurled the black to the ground with a force that stunned him for an instant, and wholly cowed him, for he had never before met one who could master him.

A yell broke from the guerrilla band at the feet of the young Ranger, whom they all knew, and the black came in for a number of rude jokes at his discomfiture, as he arose sullenly and went back to his fire, while Dean Darrington, without a second glance at him, strode over to the hammock.

"Tackled the wrong party that time, darky, didn't you?" said Anchor, with a grin, riding a little nearer to the fire, and addressing the negro he had seen so cleverly handled.

"He am no human white man, for de debble help him to handle me so," growled the cowed black, as he sat down on a log in a dazed kind of a way, unheeding the jokes of the men, all of whom he had bullied unmercifully, knowing his power as "master's man," and conscious of his brute strength to handle those who should attack him.

Striding boldly up to the hammock in the meanwhile, Dean Darrington called out:

"Ho, Dallas, you sleep little like one whose life was in daily danger."

"Ah, Captain Darrington, it is you?"

"I am indeed honored when the famous commander of the Black-Horse visits my humble camp," and Dallas sprung from the hammock.

"It is not a visit of pleasure, I assure you, Captain Dallas, for I come on business," haughtily returned Darrington.

"Be seated on that camp-stool, and tell me how I can serve you, and as supper will soon be ready, pray join me, for it is a long ride back to your camp."

"Thank you; but let me ask you where are the two men who swore falsely against me to General Morgan?"

"I have them secure as prisoners, awaiting to be called when needed."

"Ah! I am glad to know that they are secure," said Dean Darrington, with a peculiar look in his face.

"Yes, they are at your service when needed."

"Is there aught else that I can serve you in?"

"I learn that you intend making a raid into the Union lines."

"Indeed! how gained you this information?" asked Dallas, with surprise.

"It matters not how, but I have it, and more, I know that you submitted a plan to the commanding general to enter the Union lines at a certain point, and at a given hour, when a council of war was to be held among the leading officers of the Federal army, at a certain headquarters, and you have agreed, for a named sum, to capture them all."

"Ah! you are well informed, sir," said Dallas, with a sneer.

"Better than you think perhaps, for I am aware that the point you have in view is the head-quarters of General Delafield."

"It is."

"You are aware that his daughter and Miss Mortimer are at his quarters with him?"

"I am, and that is my main motive in going."

"Pray let me understand you."

"Well, since your entering the Confederate army, Miss Delafield has cast you off, and I have the honor of being her pledged suitor."

"Dallas, you lie!"

"Ha! this to me?" and Antonio Dallas was upon his feet in an instant, his hand upon his sword.

"Yes, this to you, coward! liar! guerrilla!" hissed Dean Darrington, his face stern and his eyes blazing with fury.

"Captain Dean Darrington, you will find out that I speak the truth, for Miss Delafield will be my wife within the week, as she will return with me into the Confederate lines, and I shall make her Mrs. Dallas."

Dean Darrington had drawn from his right hand his glove, and as Antonio Dallas uttered the words he did, he struck him a ringing blow in the face with the gauntlet.

Springing backward with a cry of fury, a cry that was echoed by the guerrilla band, who came rushing to the scene, Antonio Dallas drew his sword, for he had buckled it on upon rising from the hammock, and at once rushed upon Dean Darrington.

The Black-Horse Ranger had drawn his weapon at once, upon delivering the blow, and met the attack with his wondrous skill at fence, and sent the blade of his foe flying from his hand.

At the same time he drew his revolver and

faced the band rushing upon him, while he cried in a voice that rung like a bugle:

"Come on, you outlaw dogs, for I do not fear such a cowardly pack."

The bold defiance of the young Ranger brought the gang to a momentary halt, for they dared not attack a regular officer without orders, and they looked toward their chief, while, taking advantage of the instant's lull, Anchor called out, as he held a bugle to his lips:

"Shall I give the call, master, for the Rangers?"

This settled any order to the reverse of what Antonio Dallas would have given, for he knew that the Rangers would make short work of himself and men, if they found their chief in peril, or harmed by them, and besides he did not wish trouble just then with an officer as popular as was Dean Darrington, for it would hurt him at head-quarters.

The question of Anchor told him that the young captain had not come unprotected to the guerrilla camp, and so he determined to make the best of it and said sternly:

"Hold, men, for I need not your aid."

"Back to your camp, for this is a personal quarrel which Captain Darrington and myself can settle between us at another time."

The men fell back, and Dean Darrington said with a light laugh:

"Discretion is the better part of valor on your part, I see, Dallas; but I warn you, if you attempt to carry out your threat you will have me to deal with."

"I care not for your threats, Captain Darrington, and I tell you frankly I do intend to raid into the Union lines, capture those I have in mind, and make Miss Delafield my wife."

"Not if I can save her from such a fate."

"You can only do that by turning spy and entering the Union lines," was the sneering reply as Dean Darrington turned away.

Mounting his horse the young Ranger dashed out of camp, saying to Anchor who rode close beside him:

"Anchor, my friend, your ruse helped me out of a bad scrape, which my temper got me into, and I thank you for it."

"You showed great presence of mind to ask to give a bugle call for my Rangers, when not one of them is within the hearing of a twenty-four-pounder's shot."

"I knew that, master, but it scared those wild fellows all the same," answered the faithful negro.

"It did, indeed, for Dallas meant mischief up to the time of your remark; but Anchor, I intend to go into the Union lines."

"Oh, master! don't do it!"

"I must save Miss Lois, Anchor."

"Let me go, master?"

"No, Anchor."

"They'll catch you, sir, and shoot you as a spy."

"I must take the chances, Anchor, to save Miss Lois, and I shall start to-morrow afternoon," was the remark, and the face of Dean Darrington revealed that he meant to carry out his perilous determination cost what it might to him.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE INTERVIEW.

GLEN GRANGE was a most delightful home, and it had hurt the hearts of its owners to give it up.

But they were thoroughly Southern in feeling, the father and his sons were away in the Confederate army, and the mother and her daughters wished to seek a residence within the Confederate lines, so left their dearly-loved home in the care of a few faithful servants and departed.

Taking up his quarters there, General Delafield was charmed with the exchange from his former abiding-place, as were also Lois and Grace.

The rooms were large and handsomely furnished, and the piazza broad and inviting.

There was a grand view down the glen, with towering hills upon either side, and lovely walks among the ornamental grounds.

In a field a mile distant the general's escort, half a hundred cavalry, were encamped, and at the mouth of the glen, a league away, was the Union line of battle, so that General Delafield felt no anxiety for the safety of his daughter and Grace from raiders from the Confederate army.

It was toward sunset of the third day after the moving of General Delafield into his new quarters, and a man was seen coming cautiously down the hillside toward the mansion.

He wore a pair of high-top cavalry boots, the overcoat and hat of a United States officer of cavalry, and had the appearance of one who was shunning observation.

As he reached a rustic arbor upon the hillside he halted, sat down upon a bench, and peered long and anxiously toward the mansion, upon the piazza of which he saw a lady seated in an easy-chair engaged in reading.

Turning a small field-glass upon her, he said in a low tone:

"It is she; but how to see her is the question."

As he spoke there came along the winding

walk of the flower-garden at the base of the hill an odd figure.

It was an Irishman, as a cursory glance revealed, and he was stout, red-faced, red-headed, and clad in a semi-underdress blue uniform.

"Ha! there is O'Gorman, and the faithful fellow will not betray me, for I was always his friend," said the officer in hiding.

"I must risk it," he added, and raising his voice, as the Irishman came opposite to the little arbor, he called out:

"O'Gorman!"

The Irishman started, looked about him, stopped short, and then his eyes rested upon the arbor.

"O'Gorman!"

"The Saints be betune me and harum; but who is afther callin' O'Gorman O'Toole?"

"I am your old friend, O'Gorman, so come here."

"Is you a sojer?"

"Yes."

"Not a ribil?"

"This uniform does not look like it," was the reply, and the officer slightly revealed himself.

"Bedad! that's the blue; but the heart may be afther bein' gray that it covers."

The officer laughed lightly, and O'Gorman walked up the path to the arbor.

"Oh Lordy and St. Patrick! it's afther bein' Captain Darrington, and I'm lost intirely."

"I surrender, sir, faith I do!" and O'Gorman dropped upon his knees in terror.

Dean Darrington laughed at the fright of the Irishman, and holding forth his hand, said:

"My good O'Gorman, I am against you in this war, but I am your friend now, as I ever was, and I have come here especially to see Miss Lois."

"Bedad! is you after being a Union officer, sir?"

"No."

"You wears blue, sir."

"Yes, but it is because I do not wish to be known as a Confederate."

"Here, count these at your leisure, and go and ask Miss Lois to come here, but remember, not one word to any one about having seen me."

"I'm dumb, sir; be jabers, but it's a fortin' I have here, sir, Captain Darrington, or rather major, for I was afther hearing the general say this same blessid mornin' that a prisoner had told him you was a major now."

"Yes, I was promoted yesterday, O'Gorman; but now go after Miss Lois, and do not be long, for I see her yonder upon the piazza."

"Faith, but it's love-eyes that kin see a long way off, sir; but I'm gone, and good luck to yer, sir, so yez don't whip us in the next battle," and O'Gorman hastened away.

From his point of observation Dean Darrington saw him approach the mansion and walk to where Lois was still seated upon the piazza.

He beheld the maiden rise quickly, saw O'Gorman point to the arbor, and then saw Lois enter the house.

Soon after she reappeared with a wrap about her shoulders and a sun-hat on, and walked rapidly toward the arbor.

It was just sunset, and as she came along the gravel-walk Dean Darrington gazed upon her with a look of fondest love in his dark, hand-some eyes.

Entering the arbor, the two were face to face, and springing forward, Lois cried:

"Oh, Dean! why have you risked your life to come here thus, for if discovered, and in disguise, you will be shot as a spy."

"I know all that I would suffer, Lois, but I would risk far more than life to save you from the danger that threatens you," was the earnest reply.

"What danger can possibly threaten me, Dean?"

"The danger of becoming the wife of Antonio Dallas," was the low response of the Confederate Ranger, and his words drove every atom of color from the face of Lois Delafield.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A BARRIER BETWEEN THEM.

GENERAL DELAFIELD sat alone in his quarters, in the plantation home to which he had moved, through the earnest solicitation of Antonio Dallas.

It was seldom that the gallant officer was alone, for the numerous duties devolving upon him kept his days and nights full of worry and toil, and his military family were constantly with him.

Now, as he sat alone in his pleasant room, he seemed to rather enjoy the thought that no one was near.

He was a handsome man, well preserved, and with a dignity of mien that was imposing, and a fascination of manner that was very striking.

He had not yet crossed the threshold of fifty years, and did not look to have lived within half a score of that age.

Still he had a grown daughter, and the meridian of life was behind him.

He sat for a long time musing deeply, though seemingly pleasantly, for a smile rested upon his lips at times.

Suddenly his eyes fell upon a guitar lying upon the sofa, and rising he took it up, ran his fingers skillfully over the strings, and then in a rich baritone voice began to sing that charming old ballad, "A warrior bold."

Wrapped up in his singing, General Delafield failed to notice that some one entered the room behind him.

It was Grace Mortimer, the companion and devoted friend of his daughter Lois; nay, more, she was the one being who had won the gallant colonel's heart, and who shared with Lois his love.

She drew near and stood just behind him until the song was ended.

Then she said softly:

"I never heard you sing so well before."

General Delafield started, turned quickly, and rising, said earnestly:

"Perhaps, Grace, it is because I was thinking of you as I sung."

"Of me, General Delafield?" and the woman looked archly at him, while her beautiful face lighted up for a moment, driving away the look of sadness that seemed ever to rest like a halo upon it.

"Yes, Grace, I was thinking of you, and you have been with me in thought to-night, as I sat here alone, and I have wondered if it was right for me to tell you a secret."

"Can a woman keep a secret, General Delafield?"

"It matters not whether you keep the secret or not, Grace; but certain it is that I must tell it you, for I cannot keep it."

"Is it about Lois?"

"No."

"Are you again promoted?"

"No."

"I cannot guess it then."

"I had hoped that you could, that you had seen in my look, my manner, how dear you were to me, and that I loved you more than all else in the world, even including my darling child."

"Ah, General Delafield! you must not talk thus to me, indeed you must not," and she sunk into a chair and covered her face with her hands.

He looked pained, and stepping toward her laid his hand gently upon her head.

"Grace," he said, with deep feeling:

"Grace, I know that I have lived double your years, and that I am becoming, what some might call an o'd man, while you are just entering upon the time of beautiful womanhood."

"I know that you have had sorrows in the past."

"So have I!"

"I know that you are my daughter's best friend, and that she loves you as she would a sister."

"My wife I loved most devotedly; but she has been long years dead now, and I have, though turning toward her grave with deep respect and loving memories, determined to ask you to be to me what she was."

"You have had bitterness fall upon your life, and I would drive all sad memories away."

"You are alone in the world, and I would ask you to be my wife and let me make you happy."

"I have spoken to Lois upon the subject, and she says gladly would she see you my wife, so it rests with you, Grace, to say whether you will let me care for you, love you, for the remainder of my years."

"I am rich, as you know, and Lois has her fortune independent of me, so that, should I fall in defense of my country, to you I would leave my wealth."

"I hold this out as no bait to influence you, only I do hope you will place your hand in mine and say:

"Yes, I will marry you."

He stood by her side, his hand still resting upon her bowed head.

He saw her quiver, and felt that from some cause she suffered.

He knew little of her past, only that she was the daughter of an army officer, and meeting with misfortune he had sought to make her life a happy one, and had urged that she become the companion of his daughter.

Grace Mortimer had gladly consented, for she was penniless, as it were, and had become the friend and companion of Lois, and as sisters the two had been ever since.

Thrown with the handsome officer, seeing his courage, and admiring him, Grace had learned to regard him with feelings she dared not fathom.

But at last he had told her of his love, and it was her duty to respond.

For some time she sat still, her face buried in her hands, and her thoughts busy.

Then she raised her beautiful eyes, dimmed with tears, and rising, stood before him.

Her face was white and calm, and she looked like one who had nerved herself to tell the worst.

"General Delafield, you have honored me most highly in giving to me your love, I who am a mere paid servant in your family—"

"Hold! Grace, do not speak thus, for God knows I have never done aught to make you feel—"

"No! no! no! I did not mean to have you believe that I thought so; but I thank you for

the offer of your love, and yet, General Delafield, I can give you but one answer."

"You do not love me?" he said, bitterly.

She seemed to struggle with deep emotion for an instant, and then answered:

"I will not say that."

"Ah? will you say that you love me?" and he grasped her little hand.

"Yes, I must confess it, though it is a sin to do so."

"You mean that it is a mating of June and January, our ages are so vastly different that—"

"No, no, you do not understand me, for I meant nothing of the kind."

"You are not old, and I would not look upon the difference in our years as a barrier were you much older; but I must make a confession to you, and that confession I did not think would ever pass my lips."

"You have told me a secret, that you love me, and I will tell you a secret, and one which I have no right to tell—I love you with my whole soul!" and she spoke with a passionate earnestness that impressed him.

"God bless you for those words, Grace," and he sought to draw her toward him.

But she sprung backward, and said in a voice that had grown cold:

"Now to make my confession, General Delafield."

"Well, Grace?"

And he spoke sadly, for something in her look told him that he was going to hear that which would deeply pain him.

"General Delafield, I am a married woman!"

"Good God!"

And he fairly staggered under the blow, while his face became whiter than ever had it in the midst of battle.

"Yes, General Delafield, I entered into a marriage years ago, not because I deeply loved, but under circumstances I could not resist, for an influence was brought to bear upon me that I yielded to."

"The man I married I hate, yet he holds in his power a life that is very dear to me, and I dare not go against his will."

"My husband lives, and would to God it were not so; but living, I am still his wife, though hating him viciously, and hence I can but refuse your generous offer, though confessing that I love you."

"And where is this man?" asked General Delafield, hoarsely.

"I will say no more than that he lives, and is my husband."

"He is a wicked man to hold you thus bound to him."

"He is false in heart and soul, and I will thank Heaven when I hear that he is dead, heartless though it may seem in me to say so."

"He has wronged you deeply, Grace, I know."

"He has; but I bide my time, and time will make all things even."

"But now you know the barrier that is between us, and you know also that I love you, so let me go away and—"

"No, no! that you shall not do, for not a word of love shall you hear from my lips, Grace, until I have a right to offer my hand to you as a free woman."

"Come, let us be friends."

And she warmly grasped the hand held forth to her, just as there came a quick challenge from the sentinel without, a struggle, loud voices, and a tall form dashed into the room through the open window, a drawn sword in his hand.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A FATAL DISGUISE.

THE one who sprung so unceremoniously into the room of General Delafield was a tall man, with broad shoulders, over which a military cloak was thrown, high-top cavalry boots, a slouch hat with a black plume, and upon it a pair of crossed sabers and the letters "U. S. A."

He started as his eyes fell upon the occupants of the room, half turned, then doffed his hat, replaced his sword quickly in its scabbard, and, as half a dozen soldiers followed him into the general's quarters, he said:

"General Delafield, I surrender myself to you, sir, as a prisoner."

"Captain Darrington!"

"Major Darrington!"

The name broke first from the lips of Grace Mortimer, and then from General Delafield.

Dean Darrington stood calm, upright, his arms folded upon his broad breast, his eyes fixed upon the face of the Union general, while his pursuers, half a score of soldiers, awaited the result, a few of them within the room, the balance outside on the piazza.

"Yes, General Delafield, I am Dean Darrington, of the Confederate army, and your prisoner, sir."

"What does this mean, Major Darrington, for you are in the Union lines, and wearing the uniform of your enemies?" sternly said General Delafield.

A flush passed over the handsome face of the young Confederate soldier, and he replied, quickly:

"Your words imply, General Delafield, that you deem me here as a spy, sir; but such is not the case."

"I can put no other construction upon your act, sir."

"I admit, sir, that appearances are sadly against me."

"Have you been upon another of your desperate raids, and were you taken with your men?"

"No, sir, I came here alone."

"And for what purpose, Major Darrington?"

"General Delafield, the purpose I had in view I cannot make known; but I am here within the Union lines, and having accomplished the motive of my coming, I sought to return to my own lines, when I was halted by a patrol guard, and knowing that I could not successfully pass inspection, I came hither, the guard pursuing me, that I might surrender to you, sir."

"Ah, Major Darrington, I fear I cannot serve you."

"I do not ask any favor, sir, of you; but knowing that escape was impossible, for my horse had already been seized, I did not care to be dragged off by my captors and shot as a spy without any chance for my life, hence surrendered to you to stand any trial you may deem necessary."

"Major Darrington, I believe I can see in your coming here as you have, a motive other than to serve as a spy; but I can act but in one way, and thus I must place you under arrest as what you appear to be, a spy, and have you tried at once as such, and Heaven grant you can prove your innocence of the dreadful charge."

Dean Darrington bowed low and turned to his pursuers to surrender himself, when just then Lois glided into the room.

"Father, I thought that you were alone— Oh, God! Dean, you a prisoner!"

And as her eyes fell upon her lover she uttered a cry of anguish and sprung toward him.

But the guards quickly stepped between them, and Dean Darrington was encircled by a cordon of bayonets.

Only half an hour before Lois Delafield had parted with Dean Darrington on the hillside.

He had told her why he came, but urged her to secrecy, and begged that she would urge her father to take up his quarters far back within his own lines.

Then they had parted, Lois still true to her Confederate lover, and he, though bound in duty to the gray, linked in love's chain to the lovely Northern girl of the North, whose father wore the blue.

Believing that he would soon regain his lines, Lois had returned to her room in the mansion and sat for some time musing upon her meeting with the man she so deeply loved.

She had been glad that he had asked her no questions regarding the movements and strength of the Union forces, and even had checked her, playfully placing his finger upon her lips when she inadvertently started to tell him that her father had received a number of reinforcements for his command.

Determined to tell her father the information the Southern officer had given her, yet compelled to secrecy as to where she had received the warning that they must move their quarters or become the prisoners of a guerrilla band, Lois had sought the general in his quarters, to suddenly find there, a prisoner, none other than the brave lover she then deemed out of danger.

It was a terrible blow to Lois, for she realized fully that Dean Darrington had been caught in disguise, in the uniform of his foes, and in their lines.

She knew that a spy had no mercy shown him, and her heart fairly stood still with anguish as she realized that death stared in the face Dean Darrington.

"Father, he is no spy; I swear to you he is no spy," she cried, earnestly, springing toward her father.

"Ah, Lois, my child, I know; I believe your words to be true; but see, he is in our lines in disguise, and he must face the consequences."

"General Delafield, I am no spy, and I thank you for your words; but I came here, as you see, wearing a disguise, the uniform of a Union officer, and be my fate what it may, I am ready to take the consequences."

"Sergeant, I am ready to go to the guardhouse," and casting aside his cloak, and taking from beneath it his own slouch hat, Dean Darrington stood forth in his Confederate uniform, a proud smile upon his face, as he gazed upon poor Lois.

"Dean Darrington, speak! tell my father why you came here!" cried Lois.

"No, I have nothing to say why I came, and you, too, Lois, must keep your promise of secrecy."

"Ah, Darrington, would to Heaven that I could save you."

"But my hands are tied, and you must bear the consequences of your fatal act."

"Surely, General Delafield, you can do something for him, and not let him be led away to death?" and Grace Mortimer laid her hand upon General Delafield's arm, and looked up pleadingly into his face.

"Grace, the rules of war allow me no word in the matter."

"An enemy caught in disguise in the lines of his foes, is to be treated as a spy, and no power can save him."

"Sergeant, lead the prisoner away, and I will report his capture to the commanding general."

Dean Darrington bowed, his face lighted up with a smile, as he turned his eyes upon Lois, and then he walked away, his mien proud and fearless in the midst of his guard.

"Dean! Dean! you shall not die, for I will save you!" came to the ears of Dean Darrington as he was led away.

"My child, you can do nothing."

"Grace, take Lois to her room, for this painful scene has unmanned me, as I loved Dean Darrington as though he were my own son," and General Delafield's voice quivered as he sunk into a chair, his emotion almost overpowering him.

"Grace, he shall not die, for I will save him," said Lois, as the two left the room.

"But what can you do, Lois?" asked Grace, as the two reached their room.

"You shall see," was the determined response, and with quick step and face that was livid Lois Delafield began to pace to and fro, Grace Mortimer watching her with anxious, loving eyes, and wondering what bold resolve was forming in the heart and brain of the beautiful girl to save her lover from dying as a spy.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE MIDNIGHT RIDE.

For a long time did Lois Delafield pace to and fro, anxiously watched by Grace Mortimer.

At length the silence became painful to Grace, and she asked:

"Lois, what can you do to save poor Major Darrington?"

"I have not wholly formed my plan yet, Grace," was the quiet answer.

"Well, we will talk it over to-morrow, and see what can be done for him; but oh! why did he venture here as he did?"

"Never did he come as a spy, Grace."

"That I feel, as does also your father, Lois."

"He came for a purpose that was a good one, only I cannot tell it now."

"Well, try and sleep now, Lois, for what you have to do to-morrow you will need rest for."

"Good-night, and do not sit up any longer."

"I will send your maid to you."

"No, no, I wish to be alone."

"Good-night, Grace," and Lois kissed her affectionately and resumed her pacing to and fro, while Grace descended to the lower floor and once more sought General Delafield.

He was seated in his easy-chair, his head bowed upon his hand, for he had two sorrows upon his heart then.

He had told his love to Grace Mortimer and owned that a barrier divided them that could not be set aside.

Then he had sent Dean Darrington, whom he dearly loved, to prison as a spy, and knew well that military law would be merciless and the end come quickly, and what a bitter blow it would be to Lois he well knew.

He rose as Grace entered and led her to a seat.

"How is Lois?" he asked, sadly.

"She is calm, but determined to do something to-morrow to save Major Darrington."

"She can do nothing."

"You are sure, sir?"

"Alas! yes."

"I have sent a report of the capture of Darrington by an *aide*, and told the commander of the corps that I believe him guiltless of any crime."

"I hinted that he was engaged to my daughter when the war broke out, and had doubtless come into the lines to see her, and had held an interview with her just before his capture."

"I urged that he be held as a prisoner of war and not be tried as a spy, and I sincerely hope that my request will be granted, though I have my fears that poor Darrington must suffer for his rash act."

"Heaven grant not, sir; but it was kind of you to do as you did."

"Kind? oh no! Do you forget, Grace, all that I owe to Dean Darrington?"

"Do you forget that he saved Lois from a fearful death at West Point, that he saved us from the burning steamer, and more, that he loves my child as she does him?"

"Oh no, I wrote all to the general, and I pray that he may spare him; but I dread that he may not."

"And Lois is determined upon some plan to save him."

"If my letter fails, nothing will save him."

"When will you know, sir?"

"Doubtless to-night, for I bade my *aide* to spare not the spur and return with a reply as soon as he could."

Thus in earnest conversation more than an hour passed, and then both started as the rapid clatter of hoofs reached their ears.

They heard the challenge of the sentinel, the response in a quick, terse voice, and then a firm step upon the piazza.

The next instant a young *aide* entered the room.

He saluted the general, bowed low to Grace, and took from his breast-pocket an official-looking document.

His face was flushed from his hard ride, and he looked tired and anxious.

"Well, Lieutenant Brackett, you saw the general?"

"Yes, sir, and gave him your report and also letter."

"Ah! he sends a private letter also?" and General Delafield grasped the unofficial letter, and hastily broke the seal.

"I thank you, Lieutenant Brackett," he said, in a low tone, as he glanced at the contents.

"I hope the appeal for the life of the gallant Confederate was not in vain, sir?" said the young officer, with feeling.

"I regret to say, lieutenant, that Major Darrington will be treated as a spy."

A moan broke from the set lips of Grace Mortimer, and bowing, Lieutenant Brackett departed from the room.

"What does he say?" asked Grace, in a whisper, as General Delafield glanced over the official paper.

"This is an order to try Darrington by drum-head court-martial in the morning, and if found guilty to have him shot by sunset."

"God have mercy upon him."

"And upon my child."

"Yes, poor Lois; but the letter, general?"

"The letter is simply a regret that under the circumstances nothing can be done to save poor Darrington."

"Though the general says he doubtless came here to see Lois, he hints that it would be best, in these days of suspicion, to keep her from being mixed up in the matter, as she might be thought by some to be giving him secret information, especially after his daring raid through our lines, when he seemed to know just where to go and how to avoid every large camp."

"This is infamous," said Grace, with anger.

"The general means well, Grace, and is friendly toward me; but he is merciless toward Darrington, for he speaks of him as being the most dangerous foe in the army opposing us, and thinks that he may really be guilty of coming as a spy, and covering up his actions under a pretense to see Lois."

"Never!"

"So I feel toward him; but you see I can but obey my orders, painful as they are."

"Now, you had better go up and try to get Lois to retire, as I am confident that she will not do so unless you are with her."

"Of course I will say nothing of what has come to you?"

"Oh, no; but let her know that I have written a personal letter to the general, asking his clemency, and she will hope for the best, and perhaps get some sleep."

"Good-night!"

In his courtly way General Delafield escorted Grace to the door, and then returned to his meditations.

Grace slowly ascended the steps, and entering her own room, which adjoined that of Lois, found the lamp down low.

She tip-toed to the open door leading into the bedchamber of Lois and listened.

The room was dark, the only light coming from the dim lamp in the adjoining chamber.

Listening, she heard no sound of breathing.

Going nearer the bed she saw that it appeared to be occupied, and she turned away.

But something prompted her to again return to the bed.

Again she listened for breathing, but not the slightest sound greeted her ear.

"Can she be dead?" she asked herself, in a hoarse whisper, and she laid her hand gently upon what she supposed was the shoulder of Lois.

She started, for it was a pillow, and hastily she grasped at what appeared to be the outline of a form.

It was but pillows.

With a cry Grace Mortimer dashed into her own room, turned up the light and reentered the chamber.

There she saw that Lois had made what she intended should appear to be a form in the bed.

Glancing about the room Grace's eyes fell upon a letter upon the table addressed to her.

Hastily opening it she read:

"MY DARLING GRACE:—

"I have determined upon a plan to save Dean Darrington, and I start at once to carry it out."

"It is to go to General Grant, the chief of the army, and tell him all, and I feel that he will spare him."

"I know that it is a long and dangerous ride, and that short work is made of spies; but I shall reach General Grant and return in time."

"Do not be anxious, and tell my father that I will not fail, and only to be as tardy in carrying out his orders against poor Dean as he can, and I will come."

"Now I can say no more, for I must be off."

"In hope for the best, Lois."

With the letter in her hand Grace Mortimer hastily searched the room, and then descended to the general's quarters.

She found him walking up and down the room, his hands clasped behind him.

"What! not in bed yet?"

"No, sir; I came—"

"I hope nothing has happened to Lois," he said, in a startled way.

In answer Grace handed to him the letter, and his voice rung as he said:

"I must dispatch my escort after her, for she can never make that ride alone."

"Her riding-habit and hat are gone, sir, and she has evidently had an hour's start, and you know what her horse can do."

"Yes; but the escort may be able to overtake her by changing horses where they can do so."

"But, would you bring her back, sir?"

"Yes; for she cannot stand the ride; but she can send Brackett on in her stead, and he will make the ride, depend on it, if man and horse-flesh can do it."

"I regret I did not send to General Grant first."

In fifteen minutes more Lieutenant Brackett, called suddenly from his bed, was flying along through the midnight darkness, a score of gallant troopers at his back.

"Use your spurs, men, and do not spare your horses," he said, sternly, as the cavalrymen drew rein slightly at the brow of a steep hill, and down the hillside they swept at full speed, their gallant young leader riding like the very wind.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A SOLDIER'S DUTY.

A LADY was riding slowly along on horseback, on the morning following the arrest of Dean Darrington as a spy.

A wagon train followed her slowly, and there were a number of mounted men surrounding it, as though they feared an enemy might be near.

As the horsewoman reached an eminence, giving her a view of the roadway for a league ahead, she halted, as though to view the lovely landscape spread out before her.

Suddenly there came toward her from the rear a young officer, mounted well, and riding rapidly.

He raised his hat politely as he drew rein by her side, and said:

"Mrs. Tennyson, our guide tells me that there is no longer any danger of being surprised by the enemy, and that your husband's camp lies just two leagues from here, so if you desire to ride on, I will be glad to escort you, as I am anxious to deliver my dispatches to the general."

"I will go with pleasure, as the train travels so slowly," was the answer, and the two rode on at a rapid gallop, rapidly leaving the wagon train.

The lady was young, beautiful, and sat her horse with the ease and grace of one accustomed to the saddle.

She seemed preoccupied in manner, and the young lieutenant acting as her escort seemed to find it hard work to interest her with his stories of the war.

"There lies your husband's camp, Mrs. Tennyson, and if you wish it I will ride by his quarters with you," he said.

"No, thank you, I prefer to go on alone."

"You have been very kind to me in the two days' march, and I thank you most sincerely."

"I only hope I will find my husband alive, for life is so uncertain now to a soldier," she added, with a shudder.

"Oh, you will find him all right," was the reassuring response of the young officer, as he grasped the lady's outstretched hand and dashed away.

Left alone the horsewoman rode slowly on toward the camp of an infantry regiment not far distant.

There appeared to be few soldiers in camp, and riding up to a sentinel she asked:

"Where are the quarters of Captain Carter Tennyson, please tell me?"

"Yonder, miss, where you see that large tree," and the sentinel saluted politely, for beauty won from him an officer's salute.

"Is he in camp?"

"Yes, miss, I saw him but half an hour since."

"Thank you," and the lady rode on, and soon drew rein beneath the tree indicated.

Springing to the ground, she advanced to the tent and glanced within.

There was but one occupant there, and he sat upon a camp-stool, his face buried in his hands.

"Carter!"

The man sprung to his feet, and a glad cry escaped him as he beheld the lady, and he sprang to her side, enfolding her in his arms.

"Lucille, my wife, my darling, you here!"

"Yes, Carter, I came to see you, for somehow I have lived the past few weeks with a presentiment of evil hovering over me."

"I tried to banish it, but it would not leave me, and so I determined to come to you, for I knew that a fearful battle was imminent, and here I am."

"And delighted am I to see you, Lucille; but it seems your presentiment of evil has not been without cause, for this very morning I received orders that will be the saddest act of my life to execute."

"Oh, Carter, what do you mean?" she cried, in alarm.

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"You remember Dean Darrington?"

"Do I remember him?"

"How strange a question, Carter."

"I mean you remember all that he was to you and to me as a friend?"

"Indeed I do remember all, and how he nobly aided you, and was as a brother to me when you were at West Point, and dared not acknowledge me as your wife for fear of dismissal."

"He suffered under the suspicion of being my lover, ay, of supporting me, and shielded you by taking all blame, while he fought a duel to save you, and loaned you money to support me at the village."

"Oh, I can never forget him, Carter."

"But is he dead?" and she asked the question with fear and trembling.

"Lucille, when I entered the army, after graduation, I returned to Darrington the money he had so generously loaned me, and at the time of my father's death, when I inherited the old home, all that was left, I did not know that not a dollar would I have received had it not been for dear old Dean."

"He corresponded with my attorney, found out just how matters were, quietly sent the money to pay off the mortgage on the place, and I got it free."

"This I only knew a few weeks since, when I received the papers from home from my lawyer, as he entered the army and told me the secret."

"Now, Dean entered the Confederate army, and he has won fame as the commander of the Black-Horse Rangers, the most dashing band of cavalry ever known."

"I knew he would win a name, Carter; but I am sorry he cast his fortunes with the South."

"His honor was at stake to wear the gray, Lucille, as mine was to wear the blue, and though I differ with him in his views, I can but believe that a strict sense of duty alone called him to fight for the State he lived in."

"But now he is a prisoner."

"A prisoner?"

"Yes, worse, for he is accused of being a spy; is to be tried at ten o'clock this morning, and will be surely found guilty, for he was captured in our lines, wearing our uniform over his own, and he will suffer leath."

"Shot! oh, Heaven have mercy!"

"He will be quickly tried and sentenced, and even more quickly executed, and he will surely suffer death upon the gallows."

Lucille Tennyson, the young wife, moaned bitterly at the words of her husband, while he continued:

"But this is not the worst, Lucille, for I am ordered to command his execution."

"You?"

"Yes, Lucille."

"No wonder that I found you pale and sorrowing, Carter; but is it a foregone conclusion that he is to die?"

"Yes."

"Then why try him, for it is a mockery."

"It is a form, and I am to conduct him to trial, and take charge of him until his death."

"But you will refuse."

"I asked to be relieved from the duty; but my general is a grim fellow, and simply told me that it was a soldier's duty to obey orders."

"He is heartless; but I will go to him and tell him all that poor Dean is to us."

"I told him myself, and he replied that there was too much sentiment already among the officers of the old service for rebels who had served with them, and that there was but one thing for me to do, and that was to obey my orders, so I have it to do, bitter as it is."

"Carter, where is Dean now?"

"In the guard-house yonder, around which you see several sentinels."

"Can I see him?"

"Yes, go there with me, as within half an hour I have to conduct him to head-quarters for trial."

"Who is your commander?"

"I belong to an infantry brigade, as you know; but General Delafield is the division commander, and the trial and execution will be at his head-quarters."

"Let us go and see Dean," and white-faced, but calm, Lucille Tennyson went with her husband to the guard-house.

"Sentinel, this is my wife, so permit her to pass in with me," said Carter Tennyson, sternly, and the two entered the little cabin.

There were but two rooms in the cabin, the one they entered being used as a general guard-room, the inner one reserved for special prisoners.

In the latter was Dean Darrington, and he was alone.

He stood by the window, gazing out upon the scene of woodland, valley and hill, and his face was perfectly calm and showed no dread of the danger in which he found himself.

He was now in his full Confederate uniform, over which he had drawn a Union blouse and cloak, and had worn a hat of a cavalry officer of the United States army, when he had entered the lines of his enemies.

As Carter Tennyson and his wife entered, Dean Darrington did not even glance around, and the Union officer said:

"Dean, I have brought an old friend to see you."

Dean Darrington had parted with the young Union officer but one hour before, and now turning quickly saw Lucille.

He was ironed heavily, so held forth his hand and said earnestly:

"Ah, Lucille! I mean Mrs. Tennyson, this is indeed a pleasure to see you."

"Call me Lucille, as in the olden time, for are you not still my brother, Dean—here, kiss me," and she raised her lips to his, while her voice quivered and eyes filled with tears.

He bent and touched his lips to the curls clustering over her brow, and said lightly:

"The same true little woman, Lucille, as when I knew you in cadet days at dear old West Point."

"But your brother has gotten into a scrape, you see, which is likely to cost him his life, but then a soldier must not shrink from death, come in what form it may."

"Oh, Dean, how calm you are, and you seem to even court death; but why did you risk your life as you did?"

"Lucille, that is a secret I cannot tell; but I came not into the Union lines as a spy, I pledge you my word on that; but still I came, and in disguise, so I must bear the penalty, only I hope I will be allowed to be shot, and not be hanged like a dog."

"You seem assured that you will have to die."

"I know it, for my enemies have long wished to capture me, and now having me, with the brand of spy upon my forehead, they will not allow me to escape," and he spoke somewhat bitterly.

"Oh, Dean! can I do nothing for you?" groaned Lucille.

"Yes, I will ask you what I intended to request of your noble husband, whom I pity equally with myself, as upon him devolves the painful duty of ushering my soul into eternity."

"But I will ask to give the orders myself, so as to relieve poor Carter all I can."

"But what can I do for you, Dean?"

"Go to General Delafield, for he commands the division, and say that I beg to be shot, not hanged, and ask it of him as from a dying man."

"But you will first await the result of your trial?"

"My dear little girl, the trial of a spy is very speedy work, and any gambler would stake his all in safety upon the verdict before the case comes up, so do not deceive yourself into the belief that any mercy will be shown me, as sunset to-night is as long as I can hope to live."

"I will go at once to General Delafield; but let me go first to the brigade commander."

"Oh, no, for he is a martinet, a volunteer officer, as I understand it, and would veto the request at once."

"General Delafield has the power to have me shot instead of hanged, and I believe he will do it."

"Then I will go at once to him."

"Thank you, Lucille, I knew you would do this for me," said Dean Darrington, earnestly.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A FAIR PLEADER.

A FEW more words followed between Dean Darrington and Lucille, a sad parting, and the beautiful young wife mounted her horse and rode to the quarters of General Delafield, several miles distant, escorted by a lieutenant and half a dozen men, while Captain Tennyson sadly went on with his duties to take Dean Darrington to the place of trial.

Riding up to the head-quarters of General Delafield, Lucille beheld upon the piazza a female form.

It was Grace Mortimer, pacing to and fro, with set lips and anxious face, for no word had come from Lois Delafield since her midnight start to try and save Dean Darrington by an appeal to General Grant.

General Delafield was in his quarters, engaged in duties devolving upon him, and anxiously looked up at every step upon the piazza, hoping to see a messenger return with news from his daughter.

Grace Mortimer saw the beautiful, sad face of Lucille, beheld evidence that she had ridden hard and looked fatigued, and approached her as she sprung from her saddle and ascended to the piazza.

Lucille was glad to see one of her own sex, and it gave her hope that she would have some one to aid her in pleading for Dean Darrington.

So she said, softly:

"Is this Miss Delafield?"

"No, I am Miss Delafield's friend and companion; but she is away from quarters just now."

"My name is Grace Mortimer."

"And I am Mrs. Carter Tennyson; my husband being a captain of infantry under General Delafield."

"I have heard of Captain Tennyson as a most gallant officer; but, can I serve you in any way?"

"I have come to see General Delafield."

"He will be at leisure soon, so sit down and rest, for you look tired."

"I do not feel tired, for I am too sorrowful and anxious to think of myself."

"I have come to see the general about a Confederate spy, and I know you will help me plead for him, for you look so good and kind."

Grace started, while she asked:

"Of whom do you speak?"

"Major Dean Darrington, of the Black-Horse Rangers."

"Ah! you know him, then?"

"Oh, yes! he has been as a brother to me and to my husband, ever since Carter was a cadet with him at West Point."

"Have you seen Major Darrington?"

"Only half an hour ago, and I believe him when he says he is no spy; but he will be tried this morning, and he feels confident that he will be executed immediately—so I have come to see General Delafield, for, if you knew Dean Darrington, you would be sure to believe in his honor."

"I do know him."

"And do you believe him to be a spy?"

"No, I know that he is not, and Miss Delafield, who is an old friend of his, has gone to General Grant to plead his case; but this is a secret."

"God grant she be successful; but I came to plead with General Delafield, not for his life, for that is useless I know, but that he may be shot and not hanged."

"Can General Delafield grant this?"

"Carter says he can if he is willing to take the responsibility; but it may cause him trouble."

"If it remains with him to grant it, he will do so; but come, I see the officers leaving his room now, so I will present you to him."

She slipped her hand in the arm of Lucille Tennyson and led her into the quarters where General Delafield sat.

He was alone, and his face was clouded; but he arose upon seeing the ladies enter, and bowed low when presented to Lucille.

"I saw your riding-habit, and at first thought it was my daughter, who is away, Mrs. Tennyson."

"Are you the wife of Captain Carter Tennyson?"

"Yes, sir."

"And a brave fellow he is, and I have made an application to have him attached to my staff, so if it is successful I will be glad to welcome you into my military household."

"I thank you, General Delafield; but I have come on a most painful duty this morning, and to ask of you a great favor," and the tears sprung into the beautiful eyes and the soft voice quivered.

"Any favor it is in my power to grant, it shall be my pleasure to do, Mrs. Tennyson," was the courteous reply.

"General Delafield, let me say that I plead for one whom I love as a brother, and that you may understand all I will tell you just why he is dear to me, though it is a secret that both my husband and myself have kept from the world, and I feel that I can trust you."

General Delafield bowed, and Lucille sat down close to him, while Grace stood near, and told of the past friendship existing between Dean Darrington and her husband.

She told how she had married Carter Tennyson, and kept it secret from all but Dean Darrington, who had befriended them, had fought a duel to protect her husband and herself, and then given them their home.

Now she pleaded, not for his life, but that he might meet death as a soldier, and not on the gallows as a spy.

General Delafield was deeply moved through all, while the tears fell constantly from the eyes of Grace Mortimer, as Lucille spoke, in her low, earnest, pleading way.

"Mrs. Tennyson, it is not in my power to save the life of Major Darrington, would to God it was; but I can assume the responsibility of granting your request, and I will do so if it costs me my commission."

A glad cry escaped the lips of Lucille Tennyson and Grace Mortimer, the latter saying softly:

"Just what I felt you would do," and Lucille murmuring: "God bless you!"

The general arose and walked to and fro several times, evidently too deeply moved just then to trust himself to speak.

Suddenly he halted before Lucille and said:

"My dear child, just such a sweet pleader as you are is now away upon a mission to beg for the life of Major Darrington."

"The one to whom she has gone is said to have an iron will and a heart of stone: but those who know him best feel that the face of a sphinx but hides a heart as gentle and kind as a woman's, and I hope against hope for poor Darrington, if my daughter can but see General Grant, for it is to him that she has gone."

"It is a long, terrible ride to him, and few soldiers could stand it, to make it in the time left to her; but a woman's love is often stronger than a man's will, and if mortal being can accomplish the task Lois Delafield will," and from the lips of Lucille Tennyson broke a fervent "Amen!"

Seating himself quickly at his table General Delafield wrote as follows:

"CAPTAIN CARTER TENNYSON:—

"SIR:—You are hereby ordered, in case Major Dean Darrington, the Confederate prisoner now on trial as a spy, be found guilty and sentenced to death, to execute him with the honors of a soldier, detailing a platoon that he may be shot, while you are authorized to delay the execution to the last moment allowed in the sentence."

"DORSEY DELAFIELD,

"Brigadier-General,

"Com'g Division."

"Take this to your husband, Mrs. Tennyson," said the general, and escorting the young wife to her horse, he raised her to her saddle, and she started back at a pace that made it difficult for her escort of cavalry to keep up with the swift thoroughbred she rode.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A DESPERATE RIDE.

WHEN Grace Mortimer left Lois Delafield in her room, believing that she would seek rest, the latter had no idea of so doing.

She had conned over in her mind every chance to save Dean Darrington's life, and had decided that there was but one way.

That way was to go to General Grant, make a clean breast of the story of her life and her lover's from the days at West Point, tell him just why he had entered the Union lines, show him her whip, the papers and articles of Major Mountjoy which he had brought her, and tell him how he had saved the gallant major from death by retaliation, for the young Southerner, in his interview with her in the arbor, had told her all.

If she proposed to her father that she should go, Lois knew well that he would say he would send a courier, and that no man would make the ride, having no incentive to do so such as she had.

"If Mountjoy were here, he would go; but then a woman can plead better than a man, so I shall go, and see for myself if Grant is the iron-hearted man they say he is."

So saying, she wrote the letter to Grace and left it upon the table.

Then she arrayed herself for her ride, buckled about her slender waist a pair of revolvers which Major Mountjoy had presented to her, took some official passes she had, to show just who she was, and filled her purse with money, not knowing how generously she would have to use it.

Descending to the yard, she slipped out of the back door, called the general's valet and bade him bring out the best horse her father had, a racer, and one noted for both speed and bottom.

"But, missy—"

"Not a word, sir; but do as I tell you, and you can plead ignorance of having seen me ride away, and I'll make it all right upon my return; but if you do not obey me, I'll have the rebels capture you on their next raid."

This threat silenced the negro, and Rebel, as the horse was called, was led out fully saddled.

Springing into her saddle, Lois gave him the rein and he dashed away in the darkness, the negro gazing after her, and muttering:

"Now, Missy Lois do have her way, and no mistake; but what she are arter ter-night de Lor' only knows, an' in course I can't find out."

"Waal, I's goin' ter bed, so I don't know nuthin' about her ridin' off on Rebel, who are wickeder than de real rebels if he do be a horse."

"I guesses I'll see smoke in de mornin', if she don't come back to take my part wid de general."

Going to his quarters the negro quickly turned in, without stealing his usual midnight supper from the pantry, so anxious was he to get out of sight.

In the mean time Lois dashed along at a sweeping gallop.

Halted by sentinels she gave the correct countersign, with which her father always supplied her, and by midnight she was miles away.

She knew that the camp of General Grant was a long way off, and no railroads led there, and a telegram in a roundabout way would doubtless miss him, and perhaps do no good.

She had only to make the ride, she was well aware.

Would she find the general there upon her arrival?

Would he grant her request?

Such were the questions that constantly flitted through the mind of the brave girl.

But she would make the trial at any rate.

So on through the night she sped, until thirty miles had been left behind her.

Just at dawn she came to a camp, and at once rode up to the commander's quarters.

He was called out of bed, she told him who she was, and that she was going to General Grant to plead for a life, and asked him to give her a mount, the best he had, and she would return him during the day and get back her horse.

The officer quickly obeyed, had his servant prepare her a cup of coffee, and a bite to eat, and called out half a dozen men with a sergeant to accompany her.

She rode by the sergeant's side until she learned from him the road ahead, and then dashed on.

In vain did the troopers try to keep up, for

the horse she rode was a good one, and their animals were heavily weighted.

So within a couple of hours she had dropped them out of sight.

Twenty miles' rapid gallop showed her that her horse was very tired.

Of herself she did not think, so she rode into a small village, hired a fair animal at a stable, and once more started, telling the man to have her steed well cared for, and ready for her return.

"I can just make it at the pace I am going, with about an hour to spare, should the general not be at his head-quarters," she said, as she urged her horse on his way.

Another long run, and in a cavalry camp she got her fourth mount, and another squad sent as an escort.

But again she ingeniously learned the road from the young lieutenant in charge of the escort, and seeing that he would not push on at the gait she wished, or feared to ride his horses too hard, she dashed ahead, and soon left them far behind.

At length she knew that she was drawing near the head-quarters of the army, and reaching a hill, she beheld far in the distance the camps of the soldiers.

"Thank God! at last! at last!" she cried, and her joy nearly overcame her, for she reeled in the saddle.

Unnerved for a moment, she dismounted and bathed her face in the waters of a brook near by.

Then she forced herself to eat a light lunch which an officer had given her.

Refreshed, she again mounted and urged her horse onward.

As she reached the valley she heard the rapid clatter of hoofs, and soon a horseman dashed into sight.

Instantly she drew rein and signaled the rider to halt.

He was a courier, riding light, and carrying a haversack of dispatches.

He was well mounted, and the pace he was going at was like the wind.

"Well, lady?" he said, quickly, as he drew rein, and looked impatiently at the flushed face of the beautiful girl.

"How far to General Grant's head-quarters?"

"Five miles, miss."

"Follow this road?"

"Yes, miss."

"Is General Grant there?" and she spoke almost in a whisper.

"I left him in his quarters twenty minutes ago, miss."

"Where are you going?" and her voice quivered with joy at the news she heard.

"To General Delafield's camp with dispatches, miss."

"Ha! he is my father."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; when will you reach him?"

"An hour to sunset, miss, if I have no accident."

"Tell him that you saw me, and where I was."

"Beg him to stay the execution of Major Darrington until my return," and heavily the whip fell upon the horse, and Lois Delafield was again speeding along like the very wind, while in the opposite direction sped the surprised courier, who muttered:

"It is a life to save that makes her ride so, and I'll wager my hopes of promotion she will make it, for she has the nerve to do it."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ON THE VERGE.

To a number in the Union camp it appeared a foregone conclusion that Major Darrington would have to suffer the death penalty as a spy, for, captured as he had been, what else could he expect?

Would there be any effort made to save him by the Confederate generals? many asked.

To Captain Carter Tennyson and his beautiful wife the day sped by far too swiftly, and in the head-quarters of General Delafield there were two hearts beating anxiously between hope and despair.

The trial had been quickly gone through with, and the testimony taken against Dean Darrington ended in his being condemned to die that very day at sunset.

Both armies had suffered greatly from the spy system, and the Union officers were determined to make an example, and lose no time about it.

The superb appearance of Dean Darrington, his calm fearlessness of death, won for him the admiration of his foes, and when asked why he had come into the Union lines his reply was simply:

"Not as a spy, gentlemen, upon my honor; I came from personal motives, and I cannot explain them, and I am ready to submit to any penalty you may deem necessary," was the response.

That penalty was death on the gallows; but just here entered an officer of General Delafield's staff, who stated that the sentence would be changed, and that a platoon of soldiers would be detailed as an execution guard, for the prisoner was to be shot.

His brave foes, with their sympathies aroused

for Dean Darrington, congratulated him upon this change of sentence, and with a mien that was wholly fearless, the prisoner was marched back to the guard-house, Captain Tennyson having charge of him.

"I do not give up all hope, Darrington, for Miss Delafield will save you if any one can," said Carter Tennyson, earnestly.

"God bless her for the effort she is making, even though she fails!" was the response, as Dean Darrington once more entered his prison.

So the hours sped on rapidly, and the sun drew near the western horizon.

Lucille Tennyson had passed the time pacing to and fro in her tent, and her husband had been stern and moody.

"I must go, and I feel that all hope has gone," said Carter Tennyson, as he looked at his watch and saw what the time was, starting as he noted several commands marching toward the scene of execution.

"I will go to General Delafield's and see if aught has been heard of his daughter," said Lucille, and she mounted her horse and hastened toward head-quarters, while Captain Tennyson set out to perform the saddest duty of his life.

"I have come for you, my poor Dean," said Carter, entering the guard-house and grasping the hand of the man whom he so dearly loved, even though a foe.

"And you find me ready, Carter."

"Come, don't be gloomy, for it will soon be over, and you know a soldier must expect death," said Dean Darrington, cheerily.

"Yes, but not such a death."

Then the two walked out of the guard-house, Dean Darrington's hands manacled, and taking his place calmly in the midst of his guards, the Confederate soldier walked with firm step and upright bearing to the slow roll of the drums.

They soon marched upon the field, the scene of execution, and Dean Darrington saw at a glance that a large number of soldiers were there, formed in three sides of a hollow square.

He took his position in front of the stacked guns of the execution squad, and stood fearless and unmoved, surveying the scene.

He saw that the sun was nearing its setting, and yet those about him waited.

Soon a small party on horseback came in sight, riding slowly.

Dean Darrington recognized General Delafield, and knew that those accompanying were his staff officers.

Slowly he rode to his position, and facing the condemned man, glanced quickly at him, and then toward the sun.

It was just touching the horizon.

"Now, Major Darrington, as the time for your execution is at hand, have you aught to say why this sentence should not be passed upon you?"

"I am guilty, General Delafield, of being in your camps in disguise, but I came not here as a spy; but I took my life in my hands and will meet the consequences of my act," was the response, in a voice that had no quiver in it.

"Major Darrington, as a gallant officer, though our foe, I have ordered that you be shot, and not hanged, and now I will do more."

"Captain Tennyson, remove the irons from the wrists of Major Darrington, and hand him his sword, that he may die with it in hand."

"Thank God!" ejaculated Carter Tennyson, and he hastily obeyed the order.

Taking the sword, Dean Darrington smiled, saluted the general gracefully, then said:

"Captain Tennyson, I am ready."

"Attention, platoon!" came the command of Carter Tennyson, and his voice quivered with emotion.

"Ready—"

"Hold! Recover arms!"

The cry burst like a bugle's notes from the lips of General Delafield, and he spurred before the firing-platoon, while suddenly there came dashing upon the scene a horse and rider, followed by two others.

The one in advance was Lois Delafield—the others were Grace Mortimer and Lucille Tennyson.

They had seen her dash like the wind by the mansion, hail the sentinel, heard his reply, and then lay on the whip mercilessly upon her straining horse.

Instantly they had sprung upon their horses and followed.

As Lois dashed up her long hair lay in matted masses upon the back of her horse, and the animal was white with foam, panting and staggering with weakness.

White-faced, but looking grandly, Lois Delafield threw herself to the ground, rushed between the firing platoon and Dean Darrington, and in a voice that rung over the field, cried:

"That man is to be treated as a prisoner of war, and not shot, for General Grant so orders!"

Discipline for the moment was forgotten, and cheers broke from many lips, while Lois, who had saved Dean Darrington from death, fell fainting into her father's arms.

Back to his prison, but no longer doomed to die, Dean Darrington was taken, while an hour after, too nervous to remain still, Lois Delafield

told her father, Grace, and Captain and Mrs. Tennyson of her long and desperate ride, how she had distanced her escort, seen General Grant, told him of her love, and how Dean Darrington had come to save her from the guerrillas, and showed him what he had brought to her that belonged to Major Mountjoy.

General Grant had not only believed her lover guiltless, as she represented, but had given her a paper ordering him to be treated as a prisoner of war, and more, asking General Delafield to exchange him for Major Mountjoy.

"General Grant is all heart, but he does not wear his heart on his sleeve, for he is a soldier, and hence they say he is stern and merciless; but I know better," said Lois, with feeling.

"Captain Tennyson, in the morning go out with a flag of truce, and request the exchange of Major Mountjoy for Major Darrington," said the general, and no order of his life did Carter Tennyson obey with greater pleasure, and the Confederate general agreeing to the exchange, Dean Darrington rode into his own lines a free man, just twenty-four hours after he had stood facing his executioners.

"Massa, there's a gemman here to see you, sah," said Anchor, entering Dean Darrington's tent soon after his return.

"Ask him in, please," was the reply, and soon after there entered a young man of striking appearance, clad in buckskin, and with the look of a Texas borderman.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE STRANGER'S STORY.

"Be seated, sir, and say how I can serve you," said Dean Darrington, impressed with the stranger's appearance, and wondering where he had before seen him.

"Thank you, sir," and the stranger sunk into a seat, and added:

"You are Major Dean Darrington?"

"I am, sir; and you?"

"May I ask if you are not a West Pointer?"

"I was."

"Did you know a cadet there answering to the name of Antonio Dallas?"

"I knew him well."

"And he is now in the Confederate army?"

"Yes, acting as a spy; but I see now that it is your resemblance to Dallas that caused me to think I had before met you."

"Yes, Major Darrington; Dallas and myself are strangely alike, though he is darker, perhaps, than I—and we should be, for we are half-brothers."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, our father was an American, and my mother also; but his mother was a Mexican, and he is younger than I."

"Is it of Captain Dallas that you come to see me?"

"Yes, Major Darrington, I wished to make known a little bit of my family history to you, if you will listen."

"Certainly," and Dean Darrington felt a deep interest in the man.

"My father, as I said, was an American, and meeting with reverses he moved to Texas and became a ranchero.

"There I was born, and my mother died when I was but a few weeks old, and yet my father did not grieve for her deeply, as I have heard, for he was infatuated with a lovely Mexican woman, one who was the wife of a rich ranchero across the Rio Grande.

"Some months after my mother's death this Mexican ranchero was found dead near his home, a bullet in his brain, and before he was hardly cold in his grave his young widow married my father.

"For a time the two seemed happy, and a little boy was born to them; but the mother hated me, quarrels followed between my father and his wife, and one night there was a terrible scene, and the two separated.

"My father left by night, carrying me with him, and returning to his ranch, for I should have said that he had been living in Mexico with his wife, he went far away and established for himself a new home.

"Thus years went by, I growing up almost as wild as an Indian, and prosperity coming to my father.

"When I was quite a youth my father sought and obtained for me an appointment to West Point.

"I was away when it came, off on a week's hunt, and while absent was attacked in camp, my negro servant and two Indians with me were killed, and I was wounded and made a prisoner.

"I was taken to Mexico, and it was long months before I recovered.

"Then I found that I was the prisoner of my Mexican step-mother.

"I asked about my half-brother and was told that he was dead.

"I was also told by the woman that my father had murdered her first husband, and if I returned to Texas, she would have him arrested and hanged.

"If I remained in Mexico she would spare him.

"She gave me proof of my father's guilt, and

I, loving him, pledged myself to remain in Mexico, and that pledge I kept for years.

"When the war broke out I determined to cast my fortunes with the South, and so I told the woman.

"She flew into a violent rage, it brought on a hemorrhage, and feeling that she was dying she told me that she had deceived me, that she had visited my father, knowing that he had obtained a cadetship for me, and forced him to send her son instead, and that he was then an officer in the Confederate army.

"I was horrified, and starting at once for my home, found my father had been dead for some time, he having been killed one night seated in his own room.

"The old negroes remained faithful and believed me dead; but they gave me a letter left for me by my father if I should ever return.

"That letter tells the story as I have told it to you.

"It also told me that my father had recognized his murderer, who believed that he had killed him instantly, and then had robbed him.

"That murderer is the man styling himself Antonio Dallas, my half-brother, and whose real name is Victor Valdos."

Dean Darrington had listened in deepest attention and now said:

"This is a remarkable story, sir."

"It is indeed, and more, I have been on the track of Valdos, and have discovered just what he is, and that he married and deserted a lovely girl, now a resident in the family of General Delafield, of the Union army.

"This poor girl's father was accused of murder, tried, found guilty and sentenced to die upon the gallows, but his noble daughter aided him to escape, and he is now free.

"Valdos was really the one guilty of the murder, but laid the charge upon Mr. Mortimer, and circumstantial evidence caused him to be the sufferer.

"All this, and more I know of Valdos, and I have come to ask you to go with me to capture him and his band, for he is preparing to capture a valuable train and run it over to the Federals."

"Indeed! I will go with you at once."

And Dean Darrington sprung to his feet, and in less than half an hour the Black-Horse Rangers filed out of camp and went on a midnight raid against the guerrilla band.

Quietly surrounding the camp, the Rangers dashed in, and Dean Darrington and the real Antonio Dallas captured Valdos in his tent, and seized a number of important papers before he could destroy them, and which completely betrayed their possessor as a spy in the Confederate lines, and a robber of both sides when opportunity offered.

With their prisoners the Rangers returned to their camp, and Dean Darrington and Antonio Dallas placed the entire story of Valdos's guilt before the Confederate general.

With a celerity even greater than in the case of Dean Darrington, Victor Valdos was tried, found guilty of every charge, and as the sun set the day following the one on which the commander of the Black-Horse Rangers had so nearly met his death, the guerrilla chief ascended the gallows with a sneering smile, and with a curse upon his lips against his half-brother was ushered into eternity.

CHAPTER XL.

AN IMPORTANT PACKAGE.

SEVERAL days after the hanging of Victor Valdos, General Delafield received, by flag of truce, an important and official-looking document.

He was seated in his room alone, when the orderly brought it in, with the remark:

"Sent to you, sir, under a flag of truce from the rebel lines."

In surprise General Delafield glanced at the address.

It was marked "Private," and the writing the general recognized, for he said:

"Major Darrington has sent this."

"What does it mean?"

Breaking the seal he read, with surprise stamped upon every feature of his face, the story of Antonio Dallas's life and end, that is, the man whom General Delafield had known by that name.

He read also of the fact that he it was to whom Grace Mortimer was married, and a fervent prayer escaped his lips that the barrier between them had been removed by death.

Valdos had also written, at the demand of Dean Darrington, a confession of his being guilty of the murder for which Mr. Mortimer had been tried, and then stated that Mr. Mortimer, under an assumed name, was then in the Confederate army, having been traced by the real Dallas; a letter to his daughter was sent within the package.

Over and over again did General Delafield read these papers, and then he went up-stairs to where his daughter and Grace were.

To them he told all, and quickly the look of sorrow fled from the face of Grace Mortimer when she knew that her father was not guilty

as charged, and that she had no longer cause to fear the man who had so nearly wrecked her life.

CHAPTER XL.

THE BLUE AND THE GRAY.

Of the long and fearful war that swept over our land it is not my province to speak, kind reader, for my story deals only with certain facts that are stranger than fiction, and I can but tell of those who have figured in the pages of this tale.

A year after the death of Victor Valdos, Grace Mortimer became the wife of General Delafield, whose gallant career as a soldier was brought to an end by the loss of a leg in battle.

Giving up the field, he returned to his elegant home accompanied by his beautiful wife and daughter, Lois still remaining true to her Confederate lover, though it pained her to have to decline the offer of Colonel Mountjoy, than whom no better man or soldier wore the blue.

When the war ended and those who had fought for the "Lost Cause" laid down their arms, Dean Darrington, taking off his uniform of a brigadier-general of cavalry, returned to his home on the Mississippi and sought to build up his fortune once more.

A few months showed him that he was not really a poor man, and he wended his way northward, and one day ascended the steps of the Delafield mansion.

A servant ushered him into the parlor, where Lois was sitting at the piano idly drumming, and her thoughts then upon her lover who had worn the gray.

"Lois!"

She heard the low voice, turned, and with a glad cry sprung into the arms of the man to whom she had been true through all, and thus were reunited the Blue and the Gray under one flag.

THE END.

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